

## Allostasis

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8761009) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/8761009>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Spider-Man - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Deadpool - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Marvel 616</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Peter Parker/Wade Wilson</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Peter Parker</a> , <a href="#">Wade Wilson</a> , <a href="#">Mary Jane Watson</a> , <a href="#">Avengers Team</a> , <a href="#">Swarm (Marvel 616)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Violence</a> , <a href="#">Suicidal Thoughts</a> , <a href="#">Mild Gore</a> , <a href="#">Getting Together</a> , <a href="#">Slow Burn</a> , <a href="#">Secret Identity</a> , <a href="#">Temporary Character Death</a> , <a href="#">Explicit Language</a> , <a href="#">Identity Reveal</a> , <a href="#">First Kiss</a> , <a href="#">Sharing a Bed</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">free therapy fics</a> , <a href="#">MCU bicycle ships</a>
Stats:	Published: 2016-12-05 Completed: 2017-10-17 Chapters: 10/10 Words: 42434

## Allostasis

by [ruralfishingcat](#)

### Summary

Peter had a tendency to put up walls to isolate himself; even as Spider-Man, he could only suffer through so much death and destruction. It was precautionary, really, and those he'd pushed away would thank him were they aware of the circumstances. Of course, Deadpool had his own tendencies, one of which was to break down said walls (fourth ones included). As grating as it was, a small sliver of Peter hoped the mercenary would be able to succeed.

# Chapter 1

Peter had a total of ten point zero three seconds of relaxation—he counted—before it was shattered by a joyous yell.

“Is this going to be a crossover episode?”

He sighed, climbing down from his perch at the top of the roof. His head stung with a vengeful headache that had eagerly developed over the course of the busy day. New York itself was already a chaotic venue, but being Spider-Man seemed to increase its intensity tenfold. As expected, Deadpool stood near the door to the stairs. He was fanning his mask quickly and fluttering his eyes.

“Well, if it ain’t little old me and the big powerful Spider-Man all alone,” he cooed in a poorly attempted southern accent. “You see, a girl like me ain’t used to these city dwellers and their *muscles*.”

“Deadpool,” Peter interrupted, suppressing an urge to shudder at the sultry tone Deadpool used—he was quite pleased with his ability to remain cordial; Aunt May had raised him right, after all. Of course, knowing Deadpool, he would push past even Peter’s limits. After surveying the city and dealing with various criminals, the last thing he wanted was for Deadpool to worsen his headache, which at this point seemed inevitable. Not only did the man rarely make sense, but he was *loud* when he babbled; it was like a double threat. He could probably stop criminals with solely his voice—jail was a vacation in comparison. “Stop. Why are you here?”

“Well, Spidey,” he started, immediately relaxing his shoulders and leaning against a few rusted pipes. They groaned in protest against his weight, bending slightly. Peter was somewhat impressed but still mostly annoyed. “I was innocently minding my own business just unaliving some baddies when I spotted a glimpse of your sweet ass while you were swinging over to this building. And let me tell you, I can pick that ass out of a haystack.” He held up his gloved hands in the shape of a camera lens and whistled lowly. “It also helped that you were in full costume and using webs to fly across the building. ANYWAY, I thought I’d pop in and see how you were handling the city and if you wanted to be a sidekick.”

Peter raised an eyebrow. “Wouldn’t you be the sidekick in this instance?”

“Well! If you insist,” Deadpool said, his grin overpowering the spandex of his mask. “I would be honored.”

“No,” Peter said with a shake of his head. “No, Deadpool.”

“You can call me Mr. Wilson,” Deadpool said with a wink.

“I’d rather not.”

“Daddy?”

“Please stop.”

Deadpool dropped to his knees. A few tears leaked from his mask. “Please, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You’re my only hope.”

“How are you doing that... never mind. Look, I’m flattered and everything, but I’m more of a solo

hero. The city already thinks I'm a menace half the time; I'd rather not give them an actual reason to." He watched Deadpool's eyes narrow. "And having you killing people in my vicinity, or as a 'sidekick'?" He made a point to use quotation marks with his hands. "My image as a hero isn't going to last very long."

"I don't have to unalive anyone," Deadpool insisted. "I have self-control!"

Peter stared him down. "Uh huh. Well, that's a good joke to hear. I'm done patrolling for the night, though, anyway."

Deadpool jumped to his feet and scooted closer. He gave a grimy leer. "Done patrolling, huh? I can work with that. Wanna chill at my crib, babe?"

Peter snorted. "What is this, the 90s?"

"I thought Spider-Man came out in the 60s?"

Peter blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"Old school reference; don't worry baby boy, you were only fifteen."

"Okay, whatever. I'm just going to head home, and you should do the same. To your home. Not mine." Most people wouldn't need clarification, but Deadpool wasn't most people.

"But... I already planned the sleepover," Deadpool said, his voice crumpling. Peter refused to feel guilty. Deadpool pulled a greasy bag from his suit. "I brought the tacos. I figured you'd bring the pillows and sexy lingerie."

"..." Peter stared warily at the dripping bag. "Where exactly were you hiding that? You know what, I don't want to know."

"I swear it's not roomy down there," Deadpool said. Peter found himself once again unable to respond. "It was a tight fit. The bag I mean. And my penis."

Peter groaned, dragging his hands down his mask. It squeaked at him, as though personally offended. "Yeah, see, this is why we don't hang out. I'm heading out for the night, so please leave my city and its citizens alone."

Deadpool quirked his head. "Your city, huh? If we marry does it become community property? I promise mamma ain't a gold digger." He whipped a few pistols out from his belt. "See? You can have these babies. Not the katanas, though. They're sensitive. Maybe if you ask nicely." He shivered. "No, we'll save that for the second date, white."

Peter dropped his gaze and looked to the city. Fortunately, it was rather quiet this time of night. At the same time, it gave him no good excuse to escape Deadpool. Before he could gather his thoughts, Deadpool's hand was reaching out to his shoulder. Peter jerked away, grabbing Deadpool's arm and twisting it behind his back.

Deadpool blinked quickly. "...Damn, Spidey. I didn't realize you were hiding all that muscle under the skin-tight suit. Deadpool likey."

Peter flushed. "It's not skin tight. And what, you thought I couldn't handle my own?"

Deadpool shrugged. He pulled a short knife out from his suit.

Peter tensed, tightening his grip. “Deadpool...”

“It’s not for you, don’t worry,” he said as he sawed off the captured arm. “You can keep it! That one wasn’t good at jerking it, anyway.”

Saliva filled Peter’s mouth as his stomach readied itself to relinquish dinner. He felt his chest thump sporadically, and he took a step back, still clutching the detached arm. “I...”

The arm in his hand was limp, with dark, coppery blood dripping from the top. It spilled over his gloved hands and onto the feet of his suit. He swallowed uneasily. Flinging his head up, he caught Deadpool’s expression, which was one of practiced nonchalance.

“Why...” Peter whispered out. He threw the arm down suddenly, as though it had electrocuted him.

“What, don’t tell me you don’t know about my healing power? I swear it’s used in every rendition of me, and don’t act like you don’t have a shrine of me in your closet like I have of you. You’d just be embarrassing yourself.”

Peter shook his head, blocking out the second half of Deadpool’s comment. He was aware of the healing power, but being aware and seeing it were quite different prospects. “No, I... Jesus. Doesn’t that hurt?”

“Well, duh.”

Peter furrowed his eyebrows. Deadpool’s stump was still gushing blood at a steady rate. “Are you... going to bleed out?”

Deadpool shrugged. “Depends how long I wait to deal with it.” He eyed the bag on the ground. “And I’m preeeeetty hungry so.”

“Stop,” Peter demanded. “I don’t know why you would ever cut off your own arm, but. At least let me fix it up. I don’t like people dying on my watch.” Especially not when he could do something about it.

Deadpool brightened. “We’re going to play doctor?”

Peter shuddered. “Why must you spoil everything?”

“Wait,” Deadpool said. “We have to stop by my apartment for the nurse suit, first.”

Peter stared at him, feeling less and less sympathetic each second. Then he looked to the ground where the amputated arm was and shuddered again. It was unsettling, seeing how indifferent Deadpool was about the whole ordeal—not to mention the fact that he himself had initiated it. Peter’s stomach lurched. He wondered what Deadpool was capable of—he had only heard of stories, had never seen Deadpool in action when he performed solo. Was he normally this reckless? It was stupid at the very least, but Peter knew enough about Deadpool to know he wasn’t one to back down even after situations grew grisly. They’d teamed up once or twice before, which really just translated to Deadpool interrupting Peter’s fight and inserting himself like the busybody he was.

“I don’t know, yellow. He might be having a monologue. I’d better not interrupt it.”

Peter shook his thoughts away. “As much as I hate to ask, where’s your apartment?”

“Only a few blocks away, sweetheart,” Deadpool chirped. “Don’t forget the arm, unless you’d like to wait up with me all night to make sure I don’t bleed out.”

Peter pursed his lips. “You’ll come back though, won’t you?”

Deadpool’s face fell into puppy dog eyes, apparent even through his mask. “But it huuuurts. You wouldn’t hurt me, Spider-Man, would you? You’re a hero.”

“You’re carrying the arm.”

Deadpool slowly laid himself down on the ground of the roof, watching Peter the whole time. He whimpered. “Help me. I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.”

Peter kicked him. “For God’s sake, you were just moving.”

Deadpool whacked Peter’s leg with the amputated arm. Peter wanted to vomit. “Hey! I thought you liked helping old ladies across the street. Just pick me up and carry me seductively home.”

“How are you supposed to seductively carry someone? I’m also not carrying you. You can easily walk yourself.”

“Will you give me a piggy back ride?”

“No.”

“Even if my apartment is on the tenth floor and it’d be easier to swing there?”

“Especially no,” Peter gritted out. “Do you want my help or not?”

Deadpool sighed dramatically. “Let us depart before the blood loss kicks in and my mind goes.”

“I think that’s something you’ve always suffered from,” Peter grumbled. He webbed Deadpool’s arm where the gaping wound was, hoping it would be sufficient for the walk back. He wondered if Deadpool had cut off his own arm just to get Peter back to the mercenary’s apartment, but the thought was so disturbing that Peter quickly pushed it out. As brackish as Deadpool was, Peter couldn’t stand to have the thought of another death linked to him, even with it being 100% Deadpool’s fault.

There was never a true 100%; there was always something Peter could do, and he refused to let himself forget that.

The two headed toward the apartment with Deadpool leading and chatting amiably like none of his limbs were missing. He swung the detached arm around for emphasis when his stories were exceptionally grandiose. The mercenary talked about anything and everything, from when ninjas stole his mother thirty seconds after his birth, to his escapades from earlier in the day.

“So there I was,” Deadpool said, his voice gravelly, “about to eat the taco when this stupid sky rat came and took it! So naturally, I took out my gun and shot the little bastard, but get this. That was ‘indecent’ supposedly and the cops got called.”

“Imagine that,” Peter quipped.

“I mean, yeah okay I had thrown off my shirt, but that was mostly for the dramatic effect and to scare the pigeon with my muscles. And of course then the pants had to come off, too. What kind of dork just walks around with pants and no shirt?” Deadpool paused in his one-sided conversation

and eyed Peter. “I bet you’re that kind of dork.” He grinned. “Sounds hot.”

“Remind me why I’m helping you again?”

“With great power there must also come great responsibility, or some shit. Ask your writers.”

Peter went silent. Deadpool cocked his head. “What’s up? That your safe word or something? You getting turned on by this?” He lowered his voice. “Cause I am.”

“Why did I delude myself into believing you could behave decently for more than two minutes?” Peter kicked at a rock near his foot. His suit was torn up a bit and sweat covered his forehead. His body ached and all he wanted was a warm shower, but instead he got Deadpool. He knew the universe was cruel, but why did he have to draw such a short stick?

“Don’t worry, a lot of people make that mistake,” Deadpool said with honest sympathy. “Oh! Here’s the place.”

A tall building stood to their right. Deadpool gestured at the door. “Ladies first!”

Before Peter could retort, Deadpool pushed his way into the main entrance with a gleeful cackle. Peter shook his head and silently followed behind. The elevator was small but thankfully in working condition; Peter didn’t know what he would do if he had to endure ten flights of stairs while exhausted and in the presence of Deadpool. The apartment building was silent in the late hour, for which Peter was also grateful. Nothing like random strangers seeing Spider-Man in their elevator at 1 AM and drawing even more attention.

“Welcome,” Deadpool said as he slammed through his door, “to Casa de Deadpool.”

“It. Suits you,” Peter said finally. There were guns strewn across the floor, some with their magazines out and some not. A sad looking couch sat in the middle of the room, slouching and holding an impressively tall stack of pizza boxes. He rubbed his eyes; it was too late to deal with Deadpool’s existence.

“Okay, where’s your medkit?” Peter took a few steps into the room, praying there were no bugs. The thought of having to pry maggots out of Deadpool’s arm passed his mind. Amiable mood gone, he nearly shuddered at the idea.

“Medkit?”

Peter blanched. “You’re telling me you brought me all the way here and you don’t have a medkit?”

“It heals anyway!” Deadpool said. He plopped down on his couch, pushed the pizza boxes to the ground, and patted his lap. “Santa’s workshop is now in business, and this seat’s open.”

Peter sighed. He really deserved payment for this kind of thing. “Okay, no medkit. I can work with that. I’m guessing you have alcohol here.”

“Affirmative!”

“And possibly some sort of gauze or towel?”

Deadpool glanced around the room before pointing. “There’s my underwear.”

“I need something that will *decrease* the chances of an infection,” Peter said with a roll of his eyes.

“A sewing kit?”

Deadpool eyed him. “What are you talking about?”

Peter shrugged. “I mean, I was thinking I would sew the arm up, so you didn’t have to deal with regen.”

Deadpool, by some miracle, was briefly silent. Peter averted his gaze and headed to the kitchen area to look for some sort of alcohol.

“Baby boy, you just found the way to my heart,” Deadpool said softly. “No, yellow. Not tacos. Not now at least.” He paused. “NO!”

Peter jerked away from the counter. “What? What happened?”

Deadpool sniffed. “I left my bag of tacos... Alas, poor Gidget; I knew him well... No, we have to be subtle or we could be sued for copyright.”

“Oh my god, we’ll get you more tacos. Calm down before someone thinks you’re dying in here.”

Deadpool gave him a serious look and jabbed a finger at his chest. “I am dying, Spider-Man. In here.” He stretched back on the couch and closed his eyes. “I think I need mouth to mouth.”

“Maybe fist to mouth,” Peter muttered under his breath. After yanking off his gloves and stuffing them in one of his suit’s slim inner pockets, he washed his hands—praying all the while that water was actually clean—then returned to the couch with a bottle of whisky and a dampened paper towel. “Here.”

Deadpool watched him. “Here what?”

“The whiskey,” Peter said. “This will probably hurt. I mean, your entire arm is off.”

Deadpool narrowed his eyes. “Why Mister Spider-Man, are you trying to get me drunk?”

“Please. Just. Drink it so you’ll stop talking.” Peter took the damp towel, pulled off the pseudo webbing bandage, and dabbed at the wound. Deadpool hissed in surprise but stayed mostly quiet. After removing various debris and dirt—and somehow part of a taco shell; seriously, how?—Peter rummaged through his suit and found the small needle and thread he kept for emergencies.

He held his hand out for Deadpool’s arm. The mercenary silently gave it to him. His eyes were narrowed and calculating but also wary and jittery—like a caged animal. Positioning the arm to the wound, Peter slowly sewed the parts back together. He paused every now and then to wipe away coagulating blood and to whisper apologies under his breath; he knew from experience sewing wounds fell very low on the list of fun activities.

He sat back after the last stitch had been made, admiring his work. He wiped the back of his hand across his masked forehead—as if it did anything—and smiled. “Okay. You’re all patched up. Literally.”

Peter looked up, not hearing a response. Deadpool was sitting stiffly, empty bottle in hand, and eyes tilted toward the wall past Peter. It was an odd sight to see; it seemed more fitting to the mercenary title, but out of place with the Deadpool whom Peter knew.

“Are you okay?” Peter finally asked.

“Why did you do that.” Deadpool’s tone, flat and on edge, prompted Peter to inch backward on his knees. Right; Deadpool wasn’t a hero. He killed people, and it was possible he had no qualms about killing Peter.

“I... Does it still hurt?”

“Of course it does,” Deadpool said with a gruff laugh. “I cut my fucking arm off.” His eyes flew to Peter. “And you sewed it back on.”

Peter nodded. “Yes?”

Deadpool was quiet for another minute before whispering a harsh ‘*Shut up*’.

“I...I didn’t say anything,” Peter said, weakly standing up. The only part consistent about Deadpool’s inconsistency was how unprepared Peter was for it. “Look, if everything is good, I’m just going to head out. It’s getting late—you should probably sleep that injury off. It’ll be fine in the morning, I’m guessing, with your healing factor and whatnot.”

Rambling. He was rambling. Right, time to stop that. He let his arms swing out from his sides and kept his eyes trained on the stained carpet. “Whelp. I’ll just be heading out then.”

“Wait.”

Peter glanced up at Deadpool curiously.

“You said I could have tacos.”

Peter sighed; it was how he ended up staying the night at Deadpool’s apartment.

After pinky promising—twice—that he actually would come back, Peter found himself wandering the streets of New York for an open taco place. It must have been nearing 2 in the morning and Peter had never been happier for it to have been a Friday night. He undoubtedly would end up a zombie were he scheduled to work in the morning, even with numerous cups of coffee. The streets were somewhat empty save for a few teenagers smoking and laughing. A quaint taco stand was surprisingly still open, and Peter bought what he hoped to be enough for a small elephant. Perhaps he was foolish to be so trusting of a 2 AM taco stand, but it was late and cold and the tacos weren’t for him; and if they were really horrible, Deadpool had regenerative abilities anyway. What Peter really wanted was to curl up in blankets and pretend he wasn’t Spider-Man, pretend that he didn’t have any responsibilities or work to deal with Monday morning. One thing Deadpool’s apartment had that his own didn’t was working heat, which was the saving grace in the winter. He swung back to Deadpool’s apartment, praying the man had somehow fallen asleep; he had no such luck.

“Spidey! Thank god,” Deadpool said. He was lazing on his couch, his arms spread out across the top of the couch and his feet crossed on the coffee table. “I was preparing to call the police.”

“I’m sure that would have gone over well,” Peter said dryly. Had he really been gone that long? He hopped off the window sill and forced himself to hold in impatient shivers. He fought the urge to rip off his mask—and suit—for a warm shower. “Them showing up to an apartment covered in guns and other weapons.”

“You’re worth it,” Deadpool whispered, clutching his chest.

Peter hummed as though he was listening, and threw the bag of tacos at the couch. “Okay. I got you your food. Can I leave now?”



Deadpool pouted. “Wait, but you haven’t told me my bedtime story.”

“Deadpool, you’re a grown man.”

“And so are you!” Deadpool paused. “I hope. If not you might have to call the police on *me*.”

“As if I haven’t tried,” Peter grumbled. Though the two worked together at times, the mercenary had a habit of occasionally offing the criminals Peter was trying to turn in, prompting him to suppress the desire to call the cops. Deadpool held an impressive ability to vanish within seconds of a murder. The most Peter felt he could do was call an ambulance and the police to the scene, but by that point, Deadpool was always long gone.

“What was that, baby boy?”

“Nothing,” Peter said, clearing his throat. “Are you really going to keep me here until I tell you a story?”

Deadpool stared blankly at him. He was sitting like an eager child, hands clasped on his lap and attention unwavering.

Peter’s headache was only worsening with each minute, so with a sigh, he gave in and sat on the couch. A few minutes to gather his wits before leaving couldn’t hurt. The warmth was an added bonus. “How about... I tell you the pilot to ProTech?”

Deadpool snorted, relaxing out of his prior position. “What, that nerd show? Don’t tell me you actually—oh God. You do.” He glanced up at the ceiling, his eyebrows furrowed and mouth drooped into a frown. He looked utterly distressed. “I know... but dat ass...”

Peter raised an eyebrow as he sunk further into the couch; he had to admit for as gross looking as it was, the couch was rather comfortable. “That’s my final offer; take it or leave it.”

“Only because it’s you, Spidey,” Deadpool said. He lifted his mask slightly and turned to the side, stuffing an entire taco in. In response, he let out a salacious moan.

Peter winced. “Take it easy. I don’t want to have to clean up any more bodily fluids from you tonight.”

“Oh, don’t you? Just tonight, you say?”

“Jeffrey Mason had established his company a few months prior to the first episode,” Peter interrupted. “After enlisting three of his oldest friends to work with him, he found the company’s sales sinking rapidly. In a desperate last-ditch effort to stay afloat, he sent out a perfunctory prototype of the latest technology the company was fiddling with. Despite the acknowledged risk, the bold move paid off and his business was soon blooming.”

Deadpool settled into the couch and shifted his front back to Peter. Curious eyes were trained on Peter as Deadpool silently munched on the tacos.

Feeling his heart leap at the unexpected concentration, Peter cleared his throat and continued. He soon found himself gesticulating wildly with his hands and even smiling underneath his mask. Deadpool listened with impressive attention to detail; he broke into Peter’s description at times to ask questions or snark at characters. The tacos were soon gone and Deadpool was lazily sprawled out on the couch. Tired eyes narrowed through his mask as he kept his focus on Peter, who was running out of steam himself.

Peter chuckled lightly. “And by twenty minutes in, once you had started to get to know Nathan better, I realized he was a mirror image of Tony Stark. I haven’t been able to take his character seriously since that.”

He interrupted himself with a yawn, then flushed. “Sorry. Anyway, they sort of left it at a cliffhanger, but it was pretty obvious that Kenneth was going to—”

“Stop!” Deadpool cried urgently. “Spoiler alert. You don’t know who at home has watched that and who hasn’t.”

Peter held up his hands and quirked an eyebrow. He was positive it didn't show through his mask, unlike Deadpool. “I didn’t realize you were into ‘nerd shows’.”

Deadpool narrowed his eyes. “Baby boy, you are very persuasive. Since you insist, I’ll marathon through the first eight seasons with you.”

“There are only three seasons,” Peter quipped.

“For now,” Deadpool shot back.

Peter felt a lazy quiver within him. For now? Was Deadpool planning on them hanging being a frequent occurrence? He had patrolled with the mercenary before and eaten what he supposed he could call dinner—if street tacos or hot dogs were dinner—with him, but it was always so distant from his personal life. There weren’t apartments or actual conversations involved; usually, Deadpool overtook the conversation and Peter happily let him ramble, so long as it meant Peter could stay quiet. It was on a cold, hard rooftop just long enough to re-energize, and then the night went on and the two went their separate ways. There certainly wasn’t sitting this close to Deadpool after having sewn his arm back on. Peter was a tad on the surprised side that Deadpool was comfortable enough to let someone into his apartment. They both knew Spider-Man was hardly a threat, but generally, Deadpool was more suspicious of generosity.

His thoughts were overshadowed with another yawn. “But yeah. That’s the end of the pilot. It gets better after the first few episodes, though. They actually start developing the characters instead of keeping them static or dropping them, which happens all the time with minor characters.”

“Like with my daughter!”

Peter gave him an incredulous look. “You have a daughter?”

“Oh, whoops. Wrong timeline,” Deadpool said with a shake of his head. “I’m not even married in this one.”

“Right,” Peter said slowly. “How is your arm doing?”

“Better than ever! Thanks to the tacos. And you.”

Peter flushed a little and rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeah.”

“So,” Deadpool said. “Second episode.”

“I thought you were just complaining about spoilers?” Peter teased. “What happened to watching the first eight seasons with me.”

Deadpool gave a pity laugh. “Oh, Spider-Man. There are only three seasons, silly. Besides, you’re a better narrator.”

Peter looked down at his hands. He rarely wore a watch; how much time had passed? The time and the apartment and Deadpool were all beginning to swirl together into a conglomeration of exhaustion and disorientation. “It’s on Netflix.”

Deadpool jumped up from the couch—seriously where was he getting that energy? Peter could barely keep his eyes open—and flung himself on his remote, which was nestled in a pile of guns.

“Careful!” Peter gasped, jerking back and pressing himself deeper into the cushions of the couch. They whined at him in return. “Are those loaded?”

Deadpool shrugged, returning with the remote and a half-eaten sandwich. “Probably. Want some? You didn’t eat any of the tacos.”

“It was 2 AM,” Peter said. “I wasn’t hungry.”

“Suit yourself!” Deadpool tossed the sandwich behind him and turned on the television seated a few feet in front of them.

“I’m surprised you have a subscription,” Peter said. He himself mooched off MJ.

“Subscription, neighbor’s subscription—same thing,” Deadpool said. He flipped through the list of shows before finding ProTech. “All right, here we go! Ready to be amazed, baby boy?”

“I’m the one who was telling you about it,” Peter said, a half smile adorning his face. “You know what, never mind. Just start the episode.”

He yawned into his hand as Deadpool pressed play. He’d leave after one episode—they were a tad on the longer side as far as television went, but nothing too daunting. He wriggled into a more comfortable position on the couch, curling his legs up and leaning his head against the armrest. Deadpool had good taste, at least when it came to furniture. The opening theme blared at the two and Peter struggled to keep his eyes trained on the television. All the people were beginning to look like blurry figures, and the faint voices seemed to be all around him.

He sighed softly. With his eyes closed, he could better feel the combination of heat and cold attacking him; the heater was working fiercely, merging with the cold air that trickled in from the slightly opened window Peter had forgotten to close. His legs and head ached, though, and every part of his body told him to remain where he was. A part of him felt guilty for wasting heat, but Deadpool would close the window if it was that important. The smell of cheap Mexican food invaded his nostrils, along with what he guessed was gun powder. If someone were to make a candle of Deadpool, Peter thought it would probably smell like that. Deadpool seemed completely enthralled by the television if his muttered comments were anything to go by; he was ardently arguing with what sounded to be Kenneth.

“Damn Kenneth,” Deadpool swore. “Useless piece of shit, he is. Spidey was right about you.”

Peter let a small smile fall onto his face. Deadpool’s voice sounded simultaneously so distant and close. It was oddly comforting. After so many nights of silence or quiet television characters, having a more tangible voice—which in itself was an oxymoron, he knew—was a nice development. The couch groaned under shifting weight as Deadpool stretched his arms out across the back of the couch. Rain began to pitter down the sides of the building, letting in a chilly wind. Peter shivered slightly. The last thing he remembered was feeling a soft blanket fall on him.

## Chapter 2

Peter shot up; the room was swirling in front of him and nothing looked familiar. Heart racing, he stood up and a thin blanket fell in a pool around his feet. He scanned the area. He was in a bedroom, one with an absurd amount of guns, cooking books based solely on pancakes, and Spider-Man paraphernalia.

Deadpool.

His hands clung to his face, shaky fingers groping around in broken desperation. Fortunately, the mask was still on, as was the suit. Letting out a sigh of relief, he glanced at the bed, which looked a tad messy but was surprisingly void of blood or other fluids. Peter licked his dry lips and made his way to the living room. It was unnervingly quiet; Deadpool was nowhere to be found. He took a few steps toward the couch he last remembered being on and noticed a sticky note stapled to the table.

Peter rolled his eyes and ripped out the staple easily.

*SPIDER-MAN!*

*Don't worry, this isn't your apartment that I broke into. It's mine that you broke into! Which I'm totally okay with. You're more than welcome to do that any day of the week. Man do you sleep deeply. Didn't even wake up when I was standing over you watching you sleep.*

*Kidding!*

*Kindof.*

*Daddy's got some business to take care of, sweet cheeks. Don't wait up.*

*DEADPOOL-MAN*

Peter grimaced. There were various crude doodles adorning the sides of the paper which Peter promptly ignored, as well as what he expected to be Deadpool's number written in a hasty scrawl. Business, huh? Peter hoped by business Deadpool meant something lawful, though from what Peter knew about the mercenary, that was unlikely.

Stretching and working the kinks out of his shoulder muscles, Peter allowed himself to actually take in the apartment. It looked different during the day; the clutter was more apparent and it felt less welcoming now that the guns were shining in broad daylight. Before he could fully come to his senses—he was still waking up, okay?—he punched the scribbled down digits into his phone and pocketed it. Glancing around one last time to memorize the outline of where everything was, he jumped to the window. This time he remembered to close it on his way out.

His own apartment felt comically empty and isolated in comparison. Peter quickly changed into a fresh pair of jeans and an only slightly wrinkled t-shirt. He quickly regretted his decision and threw on a few extra layers for good measure. God, he had forgotten how cold his apartment was. Even without the blanket, Deadpool's apartment had been almost comforting.

Peter snorted at the thought. Of course he was crazy enough to think a mercenary's apartment was superior to his own. He fumbled with his phone, opening and closing the contact list. Deadpool had carried him to the bedroom, he realized. He was never one to sleepwalk, and he was ninety-nine percent sure he had fallen asleep on the couch.

Peter sat down his ratty couch, the same one he had repeatedly promised Aunt May he would replace. He hadn't felt another presence on the bed with him. Regardless of how tired he was, there was no way he wouldn't notice an extra two hundred pounds sinking on the mattress, especially with his Spidey sense. He rubbed his eyes furiously. Since when was Deadpool a good host? Or really a good anything? Peter felt a tad guilty for taking the bed and an extra blanket. Hopefully, there had been more for Deadpool.

Peter leaned his head back and groaned. He felt a headache coming on. "God, am I really feeling bad for a mercenary? A mercenary who's Deadpool, on top of all of that. Annnnd now I'm talking to myself. Great, Parker. You're doing a great job with that whole sane façade you work so diligently to maintain."

He busied himself with schoolwork in hopes of erasing thoughts of Deadpool. It was highly ineffective. Finally, he threw his laptop—gently—on his couch in frustration and scrubbed at his face. He felt like a mess. One slight alteration in his routine and he was barely functioning. How on Earth did he manage to be Spider-Man half the time? He abandoned all hope of productivity and headed for a nearby coffee shop where he knew could drown his melodramatic sorrows. He walked briskly with his hands stuffed in the deep pockets of his windbreaker, trying to shield himself from the cold. His eyes watered slightly and as he reached for the shop's door, he spotted a familiar design out of the corner of his eyes.

Deadpool was standing casually at a hot dog truck, scarfing down one frank, holding another three, and signaling the owner for two more. Peter narrowed his eyes; so this was the business that was important enough to drag Deadpool away from his apartment—business that inevitably left Peter feeling frantic and disheveled in an unfamiliar place. It was an odd and somewhat unwarranted feeling that coursed through his body; there was a small, but loud, part of him that felt the need to protect Deadpool—be it from others or the man himself. And seeing Deadpool casually strutting around the city given the assumption that he was off fighting didn't quite sit well with Peter. It felt like he was failing.

Irrked, Peter stalked away from the coffee shop and decided on a hot dog. Who cared that it was barely pushing 9 in the morning? New York had seen weirder.

"Hey, man," he said quietly. "Don't hog all the dogs."

Deadpool blinked behind his mask before snickering. "Oh, I get it. Hog, because this hot dog is made of pork. And possibly dog."

Peter flushed and scowled. He was supposed to be angry, not making Deadpool laugh. God, what was wrong with him.

"One hotdog for him, too," Deadpool gestured.

Peter eyed him. "I can pay for myself."

"Oooh, he's a sassy one." Deadpool nodded eagerly. "That does appeal to number fifteen."

"I don't want to know, but gross," Peter muttered, reaching into his pocket for some loose change; there was no way he was letting Deadpool cover for his food. The mercenary, insistent, practically forced the second hot dog into Peter's mouth.

Peter sputtered, whacking away Deadpool's arm with more force than he probably should have exerted while posing as a normal and non-superpower-possessing civilian. The hotdog fell to the side and three pigeons immediately attacked it. Peter felt like he was having déjà-vu that didn't

belong to him. Deadpool, at least, refrained from stripping and unholstering whatever gun he had to be carrying. “Dude! Stop! I can feed myself.”

Deadpool shrugged. “It’s tough to tell with how thin you are.”

“I’m not thin, I’m lean. There’s a difference,” Peter insisted. He was feeling more self-conscious by the moment, despite Deadpool’s mask being rolled up and openly displaying some rather nasty scars and wounds.

“Whatever you say, Oliver Twist,” Deadpool said. He finished his last hotdog and burped generously, patting his stomach. “Whelp, as nice as your ass is, it’s time for ol’ Deadpool to bounce.”

“Wait!” Peter said. He watched as an eyebrow miraculously raised itself under Deadpool’s mask. Peter swallowed; nothing was going how he had planned it, not that he had orchestrated a plan in the first place, which probably was where everything went wrong: before it even began. His hand shot out and grasped Deadpool’s forearm. Deadpool’s eyebrow jumped even higher. Peter tried not to wince as he tugged and silently asked the man to follow him. Deadpool wordlessly followed him to an empty street corner.

“As much as I like being manhandled—and you bet your sweet ass I do—what the fuck is this about? Do I know you or something?”

“Yes,” Peter blurted out. For God’s sake. “I mean, not really. No. I uh.”

He dropped Deadpool’s arm, bringing his own to rub awkwardly at his neck. “I’m Peter Parker. I, uh. Take pictures of Spider-Man, sometimes. And I’ve seen you with him. And I thought that since I take pictures of him... and okay this is all going downhill way faster than it’s supposed to.” Peter’s heart rate spiked and his mouth went dry. He tried to slow his breathing before he started panicking too much.

“Peter Parker, huh? You into pumpkins and wives?”

Peter stared at him. “Are you quoting an old nursery rhyme at me.”

“Oh, he got the reference. Let’s keep him,” Deadpool murmured. “So you want me to be your model?”

Peter looked at his feet. He hadn’t exactly configured a reason himself, and after hearing the words out loud, it sounded a tad creepy. “Well. I mean, kind of. I wasn’t planning on selling them to the Bugle. I...I like having pictures of superheroes when I find them.”

Deadpool eyed him, wary. “Kid, you know I’m no superhero, right? Did Spider-Man set you up to this or something?”

“No!” Peter said hastily. He desperately wanted to keep himself and Spider-Man separate; the less that was mentioned about the two of them in tandem, hopefully, the less suspicious it appeared. Of course, the entirety of the interaction so far was rather suspicious, but he was already in too deep to bolt. “I...I don’t really talk to him that often. And it’s usually just about work....”

What a lie; he talked to himself just this morning while he was slowly going insane.

“You’re missing out,” Deadpool said. “What a nerd he is, but a cute one.” He tilted his head. “Kinda like you.”

Peter flushed. “Erm. Thank you?”

He felt horribly exposed without his mask; neither his blush nor his active attempts at avoiding eye contact could go unnoticed.

“Sooo,” Peter said with an awkward cough. God, he was just digging his grave deeper and deeper with every word; it was a well-practiced talent.

Deadpool sighed. “Look, kid, let me talk to Spidey about it. I assume I can find you again through him?”

Peter nodded. “Are...are you two close?”

Oh my God, Parker; get a grip.

Deadpool laughed lowly. “I’m more like the parasitic twin attached to his neck, but yeah, sure. Close.”

“Okay, yeah. Thanks.” Peter forced a smile. “Keep in touch.”

He hurried away, mentally telling himself not to turn around at any point. What was he doing? He had approached a mercenary while he was wearing civilian clothing; not much could look more suspicious. Locking himself back up in his apartment, he sighed. If nothing else, he had tonight’s encounter with Deadpool to look forward to.

Of course, forward was a strong word. But it wasn’t necessarily incorrect. That was the worst part of it all.

Peter occupied his time with studying and internally criticizing his life choices up to this point in time until his eyes were burning. A quick check of the time told him it was nearing 9 PM. There was a chance Deadpool would already be patrolling—as the mercenary dubbed it. It was worth a shot. He donned his Spider-Man outfit and gave himself a mental pep talk.

“Who’s Spider-Man? This guy. Who can stick to and walk on walls? Also this guy. And... possibly many other organisms. Am I counting just humans or insects and arachnids? What about someone glued to the ceiling?”

He was truly going slowly insane.

Slinking along the streets, he kept a steady eye out for any crimes; saving people always came before any potential awkward conversation, which, admittedly, were the majority of conversations including himself. After a few circles of the city with nothing more than a petty robbery in progress, Peter was satisfied. He hopped to his usual perch on the roof. There was a small chance Deadpool was there, but it was also possible he wouldn’t show up. The two had shared somewhat of a tacit agreement that it was *the* roof to meet up on; but, the other night had been so abnormal Peter wasn’t sure anymore. Near the edge of the roof, Peter spotted Deadpool standing with stiff posture.

He smiled unconsciously. “Hey, Deadpool—”

Deadpool whirled around and slammed Peter against the poles. Eyes wide and mouth dry—his heart seemed to skip a much-needed beat—Peter swallowed with difficulty.

“This is definitely a new style of welcoming,” he said after a moment. His skin itched; the grip of the mercenary’s hands dug into his muscles. He held back the breath threatening to escape him. All

of a sudden, it all felt far too close and intimate. He searched Deadpool's mask for some sort of sign—one that told him the man was also afflicted with this new sense of confusion. Peter was met with a surprisingly collected expression, and it was almost unsettling to watch. "It's nice to warn a guy."

"Look," Deadpool hissed. "Keep your photographer on a tighter leash, okay?"

"I... what?"

Deadpool let go of Peter's shoulders and took a step back, the warmth vanishing instantly. He kept a sharp glare on Peter. Peter was almost relieved to watch Deadpool regain a semblance of emotion; it was comforting to know how to predict him, though perhaps comfort wasn't a word that readily fit.

"Your boy Parker waltzed up to me earlier asking for a photoshoot. Said he liked to collect pictures of superheroes." Deadpool tugged a knife from his belt and threw it at the pole, hitting centimeters from Peter's head. Peter forced himself not to flinch. "I'm no goddamn hero. I'm a *mercenary*. I'm not letting any innocent person get caught up in all of this, no matter how fucking annoying and nosy they are. It's none of his business. I don't care how much money he can get from it. I don't do nice. So tell him to fuck off with the false camaraderie. I don't need any pity, either."

Peter rubbed his shoulder; Deadpool's grip was harsher than expected. The words stung more than the actual maneuver, though. "I don't think he was trying to pity you."

"I don't *care*," Deadpool said. He took a step closer. "Tell him to *stay away*."

Peter gave a jerky nod. Suddenly all of his courage and prior feelings of control evaded him; he felt once again like a gawky fifteen-year-old, struggling to assert himself in an ocean of others. He had filled out to an extent, but in comparison, the mercenary looming before him was akin to a brick wall. Peter could certainly hold his own, but Deadpool had proven to be unfazed by basic moral dilemmas. He wondered which lever Deadpool would pull were it Spider-Man on one track and tacos on the other. Perhaps he wouldn't like the answer.

Deadpool let out a breath. He was mumbling softly to whom Peter assumed was someone else, despite no one else being there. Something was rotten in the state of Deadpool.

"Whelp!" Deadpool turned around with a cheerful expression stretching his mask. "How are you doing, baby boy?"

Peter blinked twice. What was the enigma of Deadpool?

"I'm doing fine," he eventually said. His tone was cautious, on the off chance Deadpool would do another 180 in his mood by the next sentence. "And you?"

"Can't complain! But I will. The new Mexican place a few blocks over I tried sucks."

"Well," Peter said slowly. His mind was frantically telling him to abort. He pretended he couldn't hear it. It was better if he knew Deadpool's location anyway; it meant Peter could maintain control over the situation, whatever be it. "We could grab something else."

Deadpool gave him a side eye. "Are you trying to seduce me? You're not usually this receptive to, well. Me. Not that I mind, but jeez talk about hot and cold."

Peter shrugged, making a point to leave out a snarky comment—even though he was so good at them—about the hypocrisy of calling *Peter* hot and cold. It was nicer seeing Deadpool relaxed and



jovial again, and hopefully it would last longer this time around. “What, a guy can’t enjoy some quality Mexican with another guy? I’m pretty hungry myself.”

Peter officially had lost control of any remaining sanity he possessed, though it was debatable there was any in the first place. Deadpool’s face lit up, though, which was enough for Peter to justify his invitation.

“Come on,” he said. “I know this good place downtown.”

The two ended up back on the roof, Deadpool with more tacos—did he ever get tired of them?—while Peter went for a burrito. Not everyone could sustain oneself solely on tacos, nor should it be attempted. There had to be some sort of world record for the most tacos eaten in one lifetime—one that Deadpool had unknowingly claimed years ago. Though, considering he died, did it count as one lifetime?

Brushing away the silly thoughts, Peter scrunched up his mask to eat. It had been a while since he flashed any part of his skin, even if it was only from his chin to his nose. He felt a heavy presence.

Deadpool was staring at him.

He looked down; nothing spilled and no embarrassing hard-ons, so really what else was left to be a problem?

“Everything okay?”

Deadpool gave a good last look before nodding. “Yeah, Spidey. Just thought I saw something familiar.”

Fear ran through Peter’s veins. He had *just* made himself well known in Deadpool’s mind as the weird photographer kid following him around. He prayed there weren’t any birthmarks adorning his face he had forgotten about.

“Was it Spider-Man? Because I’m not entirely sure, but I swear I saw him swinging by earlier,” Peter said. He took a bite of his burrito to occupy his mouth; sometimes it worked faster than his brain.

Deadpool chuckled. “What are you after?”

Peter stilled, then swallowed his bite; it went down like lead. “Pardon?”

“God, he even says pardon. Like a little angel,” Deadpool muttered. He met Peter’s eyes, his own empty behind the mask. His scarred lips were turned down in a stark frown. He gestured between them. “All of this. What are you after? I know you don’t want me to kill anyone for you, because I’ve heard you bitch about killing more than enough times. And I also know you’re too fixated on the idea that there’s good in everyone and that everyone can be saved, so I doubt you’re here to lure me into a police sting—not that you’d make it out alive if you tried, baby boy, sorry. We both know you’re not stupid, so you’re not just being oblivious and thinking this is some sort of hang out, are you? Not with the way I flirt with you. So what is it? Morbid curiosity? You waiting for me to take off my mask? To let you apologize and babble empty sentiments about a damn thing you weren’t even involved in to feel better about your own conscience? There not enough baddies out there to make you feel superior anymore? You’re lowering yourself to ‘saving’ the freak?”

With a snort, he tore off his mask. “Well take a good long look. Now you can go run off and tell everyone how you tried to fix a mercenary and how he was too far gone even for the friendly Spider-Man. Put in the face-like-it-was-cheese-grated for an extra laugh.”

Peter lowered his burrito to its wrapper and turned to face Deadpool, who was posed in a defensive stance. Peter sat cross-legged and reached for Deadpool's mask, ignoring the flinch that arose from the mercenary. "Can I?"

Deadpool wordlessly handed it over.

Peter turned the mask over in his hands, memorizing the details; Deadpool was a rather impressive seamstress. He glanced up to lock eyes with him. "I'm not here for some sick and conceited emotional jerk-off competition. And yeah, I do think there's good in everyone. Maybe it's naive, but I don't know if much will change that." He looked back down at the mask; it was considerably worn, like his. "But I'm not trying to fix or change you; I know people don't change unless they really want to. And as much as I preach for justice and lawful punishment, it'd be rather hypocritical of me to force you to feel a certain way about it. All that's on you. Not that I haven't noticed you've decreased the number of fatalities during your jobs."

Peter sighed and leaned back. "So no, I'm not here for nefarious motives. Did you ever think it was possible that I wanted to spend the time with you?"

A bold silence fell upon the two. Peter held his breath.

Deadpool burst out laughing. "That's a good one, seriously. But fuck you. Haha, butt fuck."

Peter pursed his lips. "I'm not joking. Yeah, my morals don't align with yours perfectly, but I still enjoy hanging out with you. Occasionally."

Deadpool sobered instantly. "Jesus, you're talking truth here."

"Not Jesus, just Spider-Man," Peter said weakly. Why did he ever open his mouth.

"But. Why? What's changed?"

"I...I don't know," Peter confessed. He shifted to face frontwards again. "Maybe nothing. Maybe you've grown on me."

Deadpool muttered something about a parasite under his breath. Peter wanted to punch himself for being so predictable; Deadpool wasn't an idiot, and it was very possible he already had a hunch who Spider-Man really was.

"Well," Deadpool said, taking his mask back. On his face was a disgruntled grimace. "Certainly not what I expected to hear tonight—or any night. Especially not from Spider-Man."

Peter shrugged. "People have layers."

Deadpool barked out laughter; it sounded melancholic. "Don't turn into Shrek on me. I may look and smell like him, but that's where the similarities end."

Peter chuckled alongside quietly. He felt an itch to swipe the mask back from Deadpool, to examine it more and determine what drew him to it so intently. With all the oddity plaguing the city, the potentiality of a magically alluring mask was not high on Peter's danger meter, but that didn't mean it didn't exist. He pulled up his legs and cradled his knees, staring off into the dark sky. For all things considered, it was a rather peaceful night.

"Hey," Deadpool said, startling Peter out of his wandering thoughts. "You didn't react." At Peter's confused frown, Deadpool continued. "To me taking my mask off. At all."

“Well. Yeah,” Peter said dumbly, trying to concoct a reason in the seconds it took him to needlessly stretch out the word ‘yeah’. Nothing reasonable sprang to mind. “I don’t know. Not that weird or anything. All of us have scars.”

“Not over your entire body,” Deadpool said. He squinted at Peter, who stayed quiet. “God, you’re a weird superhero. You’re almost too pure to be in this business. You’re like a virgin.”

“Let’s not,” Peter said, a sigh complementing his dismissal. “We’ve been down that road too many times already, Deadpool.”

Deadpool stared at him for a few seconds. “Wait here.”

And he was gone.

## Chapter 3

Peter was stuck between staying tight—thus putting far too much trust in the mercenary—or surreptitiously trailing behind Deadpool. He wound up succumbing to his curiosity and picked the latter since it was late, and he was tired of waiting around. A few quiet minutes passed before he felt a quiver of his Spidey sense. He eyed the city; there was nothing visibly dangerous. He hopped down from the roof, heading down to the end of the closest sidewalk. He was considering giving up and returning to the roof when he saw a shadow down an alleyway.

Wow, an alleyway; how cliché.

He took a cautious step closer. Only one man stood visible in the dimmed streetlamp light, though there was no way to discern whether or not others were hiding and waiting to strike.

“Hey there,” Peter said, leveling his voice to a mixture between wary and concerned.

The man turned around.

Peter paused. “Deadpool?”

Deadpool grinned at him, the mask stretching unnaturally.

“Wow, the Spidey sense really does work,” he said before shooting himself in the face.

Peter let out a scream, instinctively jerking his hand forward in a feeble attempt to stop time. Deadpool’s body collapsed to the ground. Blood spilled violently from his mask. Peter, shaking, took a step closer.

“What the hell,” he whispered at Deadpool. “WHAT THE HELL.”

He shoved up Deadpool’s mask to prevent the man from choking on blood—was it even possible if he was already dead? Or would he just die again? Peter shuddered at the sight. Deadpool’s face was more mangled than usual; half of his left cheek was blown away from the force of the shot alone, the other portion hanging precariously close to the sordid pavement. His nose was completely gone, with his mouth not faring much better. The worst part had to be his eyes; they were glassy but wide open.

Peter sucked in a sob. The most he had on him was the needle and thread; it may have worked last time, but it now looked like a single band-aid in comparison. He swallowed back the increasing dry heaves and gingerly picked Deadpool up. His head lobbed toward the ground, his neck twisting at a grotesque angle. The smell was nauseating.

Peter closed his eyes briefly. “You’re Spider-Man. You’ve seen worse.”

But had he? Never before had he seen a death so grisly and messy, not to mention the close proximity when Deadpool shot. Peter sent one last look into Deadpool’s still face and tried to push all thoughts away except one: take Deadpool home and fix him.

The old creaky window was fortunately open, and Peter crawled inside, still holding Deadpool close—God if he dropped him. There was little difference in the appearance of the apartment since the night before, save for a few extra bullets rolling around. Peter lay Deadpool on the couch. Knowing the mercenary, there would still be an appalling lack of medical supplies throughout. Peter rummaged through the apartment and was able to gather a slightly crinkled roll of paper

towels, a few clean—clean enough—bath towels, and a pair of tweezers. His gloves, which were soaked in the mercenary's blood, were set aside on the counter as he washed his shaking hands twice over. He wet the bath towels and set the supplies down, propping Deadpool up on the couch to keep his head elevated. Stare into the abyss and the abyss stares back, as they said; and it stared back at him, dead and indifferent, and Peter ached.

Peter was silent as he dutifully pressed a bath towel to Deadpool's face. It took a good five minutes for the bleeding to stop completely; by that point, Peter was nearly certain the other man was dead, had he not already been. Shifting up his own mask above his nose in order to breathe better, he inhaled deeply. It exposed him to the scent of death, but it meant if he vomited, it would be outside his mask. He set down the stained towel and took to wiping the wound with the damp paper towel. He held his breath while picking debris and dirt from the wound via tweezers, as though even a breath on Deadpool's face would be catastrophic. He didn't realize he was crying until a few tears dripped from his nose onto the wound. He sobbed quietly, wiping away the wetness from his cheeks. When the wound looked sufficiently cleaned, Peter took out his needle and thread.

He paused. Deadpool would come back. There was no doubt about that—unless, God, what if this one time it didn't work out and it was all Peter's fault—but did the wounds linger? He couldn't imagine trying to deal with talking or eating or breathing with the state of Deadpool's face. The injuries probably hurt, so if nothing else stitching them up could lessen that. He stitched together the remaining parts of Deadpool's face that he could. Aside from the wind, the only other noise was the sound of Peter stifling tears. He couldn't stop worrying that maybe this was the one time that Deadpool's healing factor malfunctioned. Maybe it was because it was self-inflicted—maybe it was because the wound had damaged too much of his brain.

He sat back wearily, eyeing his handy work. It didn't look good, but it looked better than before. Deadpool almost appeared to be merely sleeping, albeit with his eyes opened. Peter washed his hands and face and the tweezers. Into his similarly stained suit went his bloody gloves. He felt defeated, with his nose snotty and clogged and his limbs aching. He sniffed one last time for good measure and headed back to the couch. Deadpool still wasn't moving. He lifted the limp body and carried him to the bedroom. The least he could do was let Deadpool sleep in his own bed. The couch was comfy, but certainly no competitor for a real bed. Once Deadpool lay somewhat peacefully on his bed, Peter stood at the side of it, weighing his options. For starters, he could just go home and have a proper breakdown with the added benefit of privacy. He was averse to the thought of leaving Deadpool alone, however. That left staying in the bedroom and watching over him, or going to rest on the couch.

Standing and watching someone sleep—or come back to life?—seemed a tad on the creepier side, so Peter opted to go lie on the couch. He had left only the bathroom light on—in the off chance Deadpool got up and risked tripping—and the apartment was eerily quiet. Peter debated turning on the television and drowning his thoughts in poorly filmed shows, but it felt wrong watching someone else's television alone.

He curled up on the couch, watching the window, bereft of all the adrenaline that had brought him to this point. Man, he really wanted a shower.

He woke to the sound of sheets shuffling around. It was as though only seconds had passed. He stared at the dark ceiling and held his breath. A door creaked and footsteps entered the room. A loud sigh and groan were released. Peter peeked over the arm of the couch. Deadpool was lazily walking toward the bathroom, his hand on his left temple—which was where the bullet had entered.

Deadpool paused. He turned to the living room.

Peter blinked. “Uh. Hi.”

Deadpool furrowed his eyebrows. He said nothing and continued walking to the bathroom. Peter huffed out a quiet, incredulous laugh; how anticlimactic. He lay back on the couch, listening to Deadpool use the toilet and vomit. Peter winced; even coming back to life sounded excruciating. Deadpool walked out and over to the couch.

Peter waited for him to speak, but instead, he sat down on Peter’s chest, prompting him to squawk in response. Deadpool jumped off of him, eyes wide.

“What the fuck?”

Peter sat up, rubbing his chest. “Shouldn’t that be my line?”

Deadpool squinted. “You’re actually real?” He jabbed Peter’s forehead with a finger.

“Quit it,” Peter whined. “My head already hurts.”

Deadpool sat down next to him, staring at the blank television. He slowly turned to Peter. His expression was still one of bewilderment. “You’re Spider-Man.”

“At your service,” Peter said, and immediately regretted the phrasing.

Perhaps Deadpool was still half-asleep or dead, because he passed up the opportunity to comment on it. “And you’re sitting on my couch.”

“I *was* lying,” Peter drawled. “But apparently my chest is too comfy to resist.”

Jesus Christ, why was he phrasing his sentences in such a manner. It was as though he wanted Deadpool to tease him. Maybe he did—anything to reinstate any semblance of normality would probably soothe the still growing panic attack that had existed in his chest and lungs since entering the alleyway. He scooted closer to the nearest arm of the couch.

Deadpool ran a hand over his face. Peter winced; it had to hurt. Deadpool paused. “Did you stitch up my face?”

Peter looked away—why was he feeling guilt?—and nodded. “It looked painful.”

Deadpool studied him. “It was. You weren’t kidding, huh?”

Peter furrowed his brows. “What wasn’t I kidding about?”

Deadpool shook his head. “What you said on the roof earlier. I thought you were taking the piss, but you really are desperate to spend time with me.”

Peter’s cheeks burned and he silently thanked the invention of masks. “I’m not *desperate*. But yes, I wasn’t kidding. I vaguely remember even repeating such a sentiment at one point or another.”

“Repetition doesn’t mean shit when a lie’s a lie,” Deadpool said. He sighed. “So, why, kid?”

“What about you?” Peter shot back; he didn’t feel in control enough of his emotions to obediently sit and answer questions. “What was all that for?”

Deadpool chuckled. “Didn’t think you’d care. Thought if I shot myself I’d prove to yellow that you talking to me was nothing more than a taco-induced hallucination. Not that even actual you would take more than five minutes to call an ambulance for hero’s sake.”

Before he could consider the consequences, or chuckle at the irony, Peter punched Deadpool straight in the face, breaking the stitches. Peter stood up, hands shaking in fists at the side of his body. Deadpool, now sprawled on the floor with his back against the small table, brought a hand to his face, touching the spot on his cheek that was bleeding profusely once again.

“I can’t believe you,” Peter said, seething. “Are you that far from reality that you don’t think it’s possible for someone to actually care about your wellbeing?”

Deadpool’s gaze bore into him. “Yes.”

Peter closed his eyes. Not the tears again; fortunately, his mask was pulled down entirely this time. “You idiot.”

He knelt down and grabbed a clean paper towel from the pile. He dabbed at the wound before reaching for his needle and thread again. Deadpool’s arm stopped him. Even with his mask discarded, Deadpool’s expression seemed blank. It was a tad unsettling, especially considering how expressive he was while in the mask.

Peter swallowed. “I may be a superhero, but I need two hands to sew just like everyone else.”

Deadpool was lost in thought. “No. He’d have cracked by now if it was a ploy.”

Peter gently tugged his arm free and pulled out the kit.

Deadpool interrupted when the needle first touched his cheek, “It’s going to heal anyway.”

“I know it is. Just. Let me do this,” Peter said. “Then you can go back to having your tantrum.”

Deadpool snorted, closing his eyes. “Whatever you say, Spidey. You really are a weird one, you know that?”

“I know,” Peter said softly. He restitched Deadpool’s cheek up, taking extra precaution now that he was awake. “There.”

Deadpool rubbed his cheek. “I’m surprised you have any thread left.”

Peter shrugged. “I’m cautious.” Paranoid. Rightfully so in regard to Deadpool, though. “You probably shouldn’t touch it too much. It might tear again.”

“I don’t know,” Deadpool said. “My face misses your delicate touch already.”

Peter huffed. “And my fist misses your face. My God though, Deadpool. Was all of this really necessary? Wasn’t there a cleaner and less violent way of checking if I was real? Like, I don’t know. Asking me?”

Deadpool rolled his eyes. “Hallucinations never admit they’re not real. The story would be over too quickly if things were simple around here.”

Peter crossed his arms around himself and sat down on the couch. “Well, I would appreciate it if you chose different recourse. It’s not exactly a day brightener to watch someone shoot himself.”

Deadpool cocked his head. “You really think there’s hope for me, huh? That’s kind of sad, baby boy. Cute, but sad. Your unwavering confidence in me will be the death of you. I’ll be sure to speak highly of you at your funeral.”

There was always hope for anyone—even someone as far gone as Deadpool.

“Stop talking about death,” Peter snapped. “It’s a topic I’d rather put out of mind right now, okay? It’s not... I’m not used to this kind of thing.” He closed his eyes and leaned his head back. “My brain isn’t entirely processing the fact that you’re still alive after it watched you shoot yourself point blank in the head.”

A shudder went through his chest at the mere terminology. Death was a touchy subject for him, and he tried to avoid it at all costs, even if it meant isolating himself; it was safer that way. It was safer for Aunt May, and it would have been safer for Gwen and Uncle Ben.

“You realize that I’m not dead for more than a few hours, though, right? I’m one of the main characters; you never kill off a main character for more than a few episodes or chapters. Not that this thing is even organized enough to have proper chapters.”

“That’s not the point,” Peter said. “It’s still... I still watched you die.”

Deadpool tilted his head. “I can’t die, though.”

“But you can! Maybe it’s not the most conventional style of dying. You can come back after all, but you can still die.” Peter forced a heavy sigh out. “And it’s unsettling watching that kind of thing happen.”

Deadpool shrugged. “Sorry for offending your delicate sensibilities. I assumed you would have cheered at the image.”

“Stop,” Peter gritted out. “Stop with the self-deprecation. I don’t care if you see yourself as the most deserving person of death; I don’t. I don’t hate you, Deadpool. I never have.”

“You’ve got a funny way of showing people you like them,” Deadpool said. His face was fixed with an uneasy frown.

Peter shrugged the mask up to his nose and rubbed at it. “You don’t exactly make it easy, to be fair. I wouldn’t have been so cold if I had known you’d go and do something like this.”

Deadpool snorted. “So what? You would have pitied me and acted like I was some sort of fragile porcelain doll? You would have been walking on eggshells in an attempt not to set me off?”

“That’s not what I mean!” Peter clenched the seat of the couch. “It’s. I don’t want you to die. I’ll stitch you up if it happens, but I don’t want you to die. Especially not when it can be avoided. I can’t watch something like that again. It. God, it scared me. I didn’t have faith in your healing factor for a minute. It felt like you weren’t coming back. And I can’t handle that.”

Deadpool looked at him curiously. “You’ve seen me die before.”

Peter shook his head rapidly. “No I. I’ve seen you hurt. And I know you *have* died, but I’d never seen it first hand. It’s—God it’s horrible, Deadpool. How can you encourage that?”

“Stops the voices,” Deadpool said. “At least for a few. Not to mention that Death is pretty sexy.”

“Please,” Peter said. His voice sounded hollow to his own ears. “Just, don’t do that again. I don’t want to lose you again.”

Deadpool gave him a perplexed glance. “You can’t—I always come back.”

“It’s not the same,” Peter said quietly. He fiddled with his gloved hands. His mind was swarming with worries and complexities he didn’t have the current emotional strength to understand. Even



with Deadpool sitting right beside him, the man still didn't seem tangible—it was as though his form would dissolve within seconds, the image crumbling in front of Peter in a twisted form of a memory. Tears of anger stung at his eyes, reminding him of his weaknesses. He tugged his mask back down, not wanting the other man to see how fixed in place his scowl remained. “It’s still like losing a part of you. It comes back differently. It’s not the same. Please, Deadpool.”

Deadpool was quiet for a minute. Eventually, he stood up and walked to the bedroom. He turned slightly before entering.

“It’s weird hearing you beg, Spidey. It doesn’t become you. You’re stronger than that.”

Peter was left alone, his heart racing with ire and concern. He nearly leapt in surprise when Deadpool returned with blankets and pillows.

“Uhh,” Peter said intelligently.

“Wow, you’re a jumpy little thing! Move over,” Deadpool ordered. He shoved the conglomeration of blankets and throw pillows at Peter, who grasped wildly for them. “BRB!”

“That... we’re having a verbal conversation!” Peter yelled after Deadpool, who was making his way to the kitchen. Peter shucked a blanket around his shoulders, tugging the ends close to his chest. It was the same blanket from the night before. He couldn’t understand the switch in the atmosphere, but he was nevertheless thankful for it.

“LOL you’re totes adorbs BFF <3,” Deadpool called back.

Peter rolled his eyes affectionately and settled further into the couch; maybe they’d get around to watching more of ProTech, not that Peter had managed to even stay awake for the end of the first episode. Spending time with Deadpool seemed to be a chaotic situation. Peter never felt entirely in control, especially with the mercenary’s rapid and somewhat dangerous mood swings. Peter knew all too well the emotions puberty brought, but he was pretty certain Deadpool was much too old for that. Though, to be fair, the man was rather keen on hoarding hello kitty paraphernalia. Admittedly, the weird cat thing was somewhat cute, but not enough to warrant a closet full of plushies. Deadpool returned with two steaming mugs and thrust one toward Peter. He accepted it and glanced down.

“Hot chocolate,” he murmured in surprise, reaching up to push back up his mask. “Thank you.”

“It’s not a sleepover without hot chocolate,” Deadpool stressed. “Though we’re still missing truth or dare and spin the bottle. I’ll go first. I dare you to kiss me.”

“That’s not really how this works,” Peter said behind his mug. The warm liquid relaxed his stomach and mind. “But here.”

Deadpool’s eyes shot wide open, which in itself was entertaining. Peter fished a chocolate kiss out of his pocket and threw it at Deadpool, who went silent for a moment.

“Spider-Man,” he said slowly, “were you seriously carrying that around this whole time?”

“Longer,” Peter said with a satisfied grin, leaning back into the cushions. “I knew it’d come to this one day, so I made sure to prepare.” He pelted a second chocolate at the mercenary. “Have another kiss.”

Deadpool groaned. “Spidey, that’s just *cruel*. Getting an old man’s hopes up and crushing it like the heartbreaker teen pop idol you are.”

“Also not really how this works, but I appreciate the endearing title. I think we should change yours to smarmy, hyper-sexual curmudgeon with a fetish for Mexican food.”

Deadpool swooned. “You know me so well. And for winning my heart, your prize is....”

“No physical contact,” Peter stressed.

Deadpool huffed. “What, you take me for some sort of hussy? I don’t put out until at least the third date, Mister Spider-Man.” He paused and stretched out, kicking his way onto Peter’s lap. “That’s a lie. Take me now.”

Peter shoved him as well as he could while still holding the mug of hot chocolate.

Deadpool looked at Peter with heavy, serious eyes. Peter was briefly worried he was about to be shot, or kissed, or both. “I can’t pretend that you’re only my friend when you’re holding my body tight.”

Peter wrinkled his nose. “I just pushed you off of me.”

The mercenary let out a distressed groan. “Spidey! You’re supposed to *know* Canadian 2000s pop singles in order to get to the next affection level with me. That one involves making out.”

“And I’d know Canadian music because?” Peter asked dryly.

“I’ll have you know it was all the way up to number 22 here in the US of A.”

Peter tried—and failed—to stifle a laugh. Deadpool’s eyes narrowed in response. “I’m sorry. You just—pfft. You’re so Canadian. ‘US of ‘Eh’, you say? Not to mention your affection isn’t exactly lacking. I’m pretty sure I’m the one you’re supposed to be buttering up. It’s not working, for the record.”

“Fine,” Deadpool whined. “My backup plan is watching ProTech with you until you slowly fall in love with me and we elope.”

Peter felt an odd quiver through his chest, his laughter quickly tapering off; he wrote it off as the hot chocolate being still a tad too warm. “I’m down to watch more of the show. I’ll try not to fall asleep during it.”

Deadpool cooed. “You were just the cutest little spider. All curled up and snoring.”

“I *don’t* snore,” Peter said indignantly. “It’s the mask, okay? It’s tough to breathe through that.”

Deadpool shrugged. “You can take it off at any time, baby boy.” He thought for a moment. “Or I can put mine back on. Actually, I should probably go do that.”

Peter latched onto Deadpool’s arm before he could so much as shift from the couch. “Don’t even think about it.”

Deadpool gave an appreciative whistle. “I love it when you take control. But really. You just sewed my face back together. You don’t deserve to have to look at it, too.”

“Seriously, stop,” Peter said softly. “I don’t mind, Deadpool. I just. I can’t let anyone else get hurt through association with my identity. It’s not that I don’t trust you.”

Did he? He didn’t think he did, but he wasn’t so sure anymore. He swallowed back the rest of the words he wanted to vent; now wasn’t the time.

“Can I veto to change your title to moody jailbait who has a tragic backstory?”

Peter snorted, holding back a snuffle. “Shut up—I’m twenty-two. And only if I can change yours to sappy loudmouth with the health of an eighty-year-old.”

“Snarky insect with an amazing ass?”

“Arachnid,” Peter corrected; he could fund his college tuition by charging a dollar for every time someone misclassified spiders. He lowered his voice. “Misunderstood mercenary who needs to stay alive.”

Deadpool stared at him briefly. “And you called *me* sappy. I think you need to take a long look in the mirror, honey. Preferably while naked, and while I’m in the room. For science.”

Peter swatted at Deadpool’s arm. He didn’t bother to stop his grin. “Turn on the show already.”

The two positioned themselves into a comfortable back and forth where Deadpool would shout spoilers he believed in while Peter would immediately shoot them down on the counter of them defying reality on at least three different levels. Peter found himself laughing and actually able to push aside his worries; as long as Deadpool was next to him cracking jokes, he wasn’t elsewhere with a cracked skull. Peter leaned back into the couch and rested slightly against the mercenary. It was cramped enough that the movement didn’t necessarily look peculiar, and the extra contact soothed any of Peter’s remaining distress. Deadpool’s body was surprisingly warm—Peter assumed returning from the dead would leave someone cold and stiff—and it served to be just as good as the blankets thrown over his lap.

When Deadpool wrapped an arm around him, tugged him close, and jabbed a finger at the screen to laugh and point out a wardrobe malfunction that resulted in far too much underwear for the rating the show had, Peter just smiled and leaned closer.

## Chapter 4

### Chapter Notes

Sorry for uploading this so late; college is a pain. I'll likely have a more consistent uploading schedule from now on.

Morning came far too early; the two still had four more episodes of season 1. Peter's eyes strained in a desperate attempt to stay open. The clock read 7:45 AM, though Peter had begun doubting his reading abilities about an hour ago—or was it two? His sense of time had already vanished; he knew that much. Deadpool was leaning back against the couch with his mouth wide open and drool spilling out. He looked perfectly content. Peter smiled.

There was a large part of him insistent he stay up to assuage any uncertainties surrounding Deadpool's mortality situation. His body screamed at him to sleep, though, and he knew if he didn't fit some sort of nap in that he would be skipping patrol tonight, lest he wanted to risk falling from webs. And God, he needed a long shower and a change of clothing.

When he returned from the bathroom to try freshening up, Deadpool was wide awake and humming in the kitchen. Peter walked in and was immediately greeted by stacks of pancakes.

"Uhh," he said. "You're quick."

Deadpool presented him with a hurt expression. "Way to make a lad feel special. It's been a while, okay? And that ass... It's not the length of the adventure, though, it's the quality of it." He winked devilishly.

Peter rolled his eyes and took a seat at the table. How such a scene had become almost normal, Peter had no idea. He quietly ate a few pancakes while watching Deadpool refuse to stop cooking.

"I think two hundred is enough," Peter said, raising his voice in hopes of it reaching Deadpool.

"No such thing as too much!" Deadpool flipped another pancake.

"It's not the quantity of the adventure," Peter said dully. "It's the quality of it."

Deadpool paused. The pancake sizzled angrily in the pan. "No. We're not doing that. Why are you so fucking intent on ruining every chance I have?"

Peter was about to offer an extremely confused reply when he noticed Deadpool wasn't even looking toward him. He was staring at the kitchen wall, talking quieter than normal.

"Just leave him alone." Deadpool sounded trite, as though the conversation was frequent. "He's better off not having to deal with that kind of shit, anyway. Be doing him a favor."

Peter cleared his throat. "So, uh. Deadpool. How about we marathon through the rest of season 1?"

Deadpool halted in his speech and glanced toward Peter with a sad smile. "Sorry baby boy, but I can see the fact that you're barely staying conscious. You go get some rest before you pass out on me, or I'll end up fondling that ass and drawing on your mask with a sharpie—don't give me the

opportunity.”

Peter grimaced. “Yeah, I’m pretty out of it. Sleep is a good idea. Thanks for the pancakes and hot chocolate, Deadpool. I’ll catch you later, maybe patrol?”

Deadpool nodded, distracted. “It’s Wade.”

Peter paused in his exit. He was already aware of Deadpool’s actual name—it certainly wasn’t looked at as a secret, at least not by the mercenary himself—but being asked to use it felt like he had reached a whole different level. A level of what, he wasn’t entirely sure, but it pleased him.

“See ya, Wade,” Peter said softly and swung away.

After a quick and incredibly refreshing shower, Peter flung himself onto his bed. The crisp sheets smelled of clean lavender and he groaned with happiness. He hadn’t realized how tired he was until he had to move. He yawned; he’d focus on important things later, but for now, all he wanted to do was sleep.

It was dark when he woke. Crickets chirped and owls hooted faintly in the distance. Peter checked his clock: 8 PM. He had slept a good 10 hours. He stretched languidly before searching for his Spider-Man suit; Deadpool probably wouldn’t mind starting patrol a little early. Peter swung toward Deadpool’s apartment, banking on the window being open as it was when he left. It was, but the apartment was dark. The light was neither on in the bathroom nor any other section of the apartment.

Perhaps Deadpool had held the same idea and started patrol early. He made his way to the familiar rooftop and glanced around where there was similarly no sign of Deadpool. He considered sending him a quick text, but he figured the man would catch up with him eventually; in the meantime, he had a city to protect.

Robbery was such a petty crime but also obnoxiously common.

Peter cornered a man dressed in a raggedy winter jacket. His eyes darted around as he clutched at a purple purse.

Peter sighed. “Come on man, really? Robbing an old lady’s purse and fleeing to the alley? Would it hurt you to show some originality.”

“Stay back,” the man warned, though his voice wavered significantly. He quickly brandished a small army knife, its metal shine gleaming against the moonlight.

Peter put his hands up. “Hey, man. Neither of us wants any trouble. You can just hand over the purse, and no one has to get hurt.”

“Bullshit!” The man yelled. He was gaining confidence, which meant time was becoming a more sensitive factor. While he was riled up, Peter shot a web at the hand holding the knife, disabling movement. Fear flashed through the robber’s eyes.

“Come on,” Peter said. “You really going to make me work for this?”

The man tried to turn and run, but Peter jumped in front of him, blocking the alternate path. He webbed the man to the wall, taking precaution to leave the purse untouched.

“Cliché setting, poor concentration, and a weak escape. I’d give it a 3/10 at best,” Peter said. His tone was biting, his mind already weary of the crime. “But it certainly makes my job easier.”

A loud buzzing sound interrupted them. Peter threw the purse to the woman and urged her to call the police as he swung after the source of the new noise.

He ended up in a park. It was late for anyone to still be there, and Peter had trouble distinguishing potential people from what ended up being mainly tree shadows. Eventually, he saw enough motion toward the left that he knew it had to be a person. He skidded to a stop in front of a wide fountain. It threw water up energetically, a few drops splashing over the edge from time to time.

There was no one.

Furrowing his eyebrows, he took cautious steps around the centerpiece. The rest of the park encircled it, leaving him in a zone of confusion. His Spidey sense was quivering, and he *knew* he had heard some sort of noise, and there had to be a source to it.

“Hello?”

Waiting, he relaxed his posture slightly. Despite the brief concern, nothing jumped out at him and no one stabbed him. On one hand, the lack of response was comforting, but the silence was also telling in a not so positive regard. Perhaps he was going insane, at least more-so than he already was. A clap of thunder startled him out of his thoughts, and then rain was spilling down from the darkening sky. He felt his mask grow damp, the spandex squeezing together and forming a mold to his skin.

Peter relented and sat down on the edge of the fountain, mulling over his next actions. The cold concrete of the decoration felt almost gentle against his aching bones. It was slippery, too, he realized—a moment too late, having already fallen into the water. He sighed, steadying his hand against the bottom of the fountain to heave himself back up. He scrambled to his feet, water sloshing up to his ankles.

Just great. Granted, it was already raining so the water had little effect on him, but it was the whole principle of the matter really. Beyond that, he always felt awkwardly exposed when his outfit was drenched. Fortunately, and somewhat oddly, there was no one around to notice.

A branch snapped behind him. Peter spun on his feet, doing his best not to slip on the trail of water he had left. So much for being alone. He scanned the area and listened closely.

Within seconds he was on the ground. He scrambled with the body on him for dominance, eventually gaining the upper hand before immediately losing it again. He struggled against the other’s hold on his wrists.

The man wore a wicked grin and a hood on the upper half of his face. His body was buzzing, the noise actually able to vibrate. “Ahh Spider-Man, in the flesh.”

Peter kned the man in the stomach. “Actually, in a suit, but I’ll give you half credit for participation.”

He tsk’ed and pushed Peter closer to the ground. “There’s no need for such rough play. I just want to *talk*.”

“You know, usually people introduce themselves before getting this intimate with me.”

“Oh, how rude of me. Allow me to introduce you to Swarm!”

Bees, Peter realized. There were *bees* on the man’s body that were buzzing and vibrating and oh God *piercing his suit*. He yelped, landing another kick on Swarm’s face and crawling backward.

“So much for just a talk! Jesus, I guess I’d be mad if I looked like you, too.”

Swarm narrowed his eyes. “You talk when I say you talk!”

He threw his arm out, an energetic group of bees darting out and circling Peter. Peter swore under his breath, trying to web as many as he could. Their ability to regroup was instantaneous, though, destroying any semblance of success he had. The stings were excruciating; they felt like tiny bullets embedded in his skin. His only solace was the fact that he wasn’t allergic to bee stings. “You sound like every math teacher I’ve ever had. Maybe consider a change in profession? If there’s one thing people hate more than bees, it’s math.”

Swarm directed the bees toward Peter’s legs, tripping him again and encircling him closely. Barely able to see through the storm of insects, he blindly shot out a web in hopes of it attaching to a branch or building. He pulled himself up onto a nearby tree and swatted away some lingering bugs.

“You’ll stay away from this city,” Swarm warned. “I don’t want you interrupting my business here.”

“What business? Making honey?” Peter jumped and landed a punch on the man. Bees quickly swallowed up his hand. He shook them off and tried for another punch.

Swarm caught his hand and lifted him off the ground. Peter felt his legs dangling, thrashing around for dominance. He managed to knee the villain in the stomach and use the momentum to push himself off.

“I’m flattered you find me so threatening and all,” Peter said as he shot a web directly at the man’s waist. It flung him back, sticking him to the side of the fountain. “But there’s no need to be mean about it.”

“You’ll regret this,” Swarm said.

Peter rolled his eyes. “I swear, there’s got to be an evil handbook out there that has a list of cryptic lines that are supposed to be intimidating, and every villain in New York City owns it.”

“So will Deadpool,” he continued. Peter’s shoulders stiffened, but he did his best to remain stoic. “And that little reporter who follows him around.”

Was it really that obvious?

“I’m sure I could convince Deadpool to do just about anything to protect that little brat. You should see the way he looks at him. Parker, was it?”

Peter didn’t want to hear any more. He webbed Swarm’s mouth and silently dialed 911. Despite his inability to speak, Swarm radiated a smug aura. His eyes were narrowed but gleeful, clearly relishing in Peter’s discomfort. Peter didn’t bother making a final snarky remark; his mind was too muddled for it.

He wandered back around the block toward the rooftop; if he hadn’t been there before, Deadpool would inevitably be there now. There wasn’t a reason for him not to be unless Swarm had somehow confronted him already? Peter would have known, though; there was no way it would have passed his Spidey senses.

Peter was wrong. The rooftop had a whistling wind, but no signs of actual life. Furrowing his eyebrows, Peter considered checking Deadpool’s apartment again. Was it considered an invasion of privacy? Usually the mercenary was here, or at least somewhere Peter was keenly aware of—be

it the nearby taco truck or his own apartment. Peter sucked in an uneasy breath and flung himself toward the apartment.

It was still dark, and still empty. Peter felt his heart thrash against his rib cage; it wanted out—out somewhere that didn't involve fear or other emotions. There were no signs of struggle or forced entry, but there were also no sticky notes or texts of explanation. Peter sat stiffly on the couch, doing his best to ignore the uncomfortable itch from his stung skin. The wounds were healing quickly, but not quickly enough.

Maybe he had just missed Deadpool, who was stopping by the store or for late night tacos. Peter caught a glimpse of the two mugs of hot chocolate, still sticky and uncleaned from the night before. He picked up the mugs and cleaned them by the sink, mentally counting to sixty and then repeating.

He ended up back on the sofa. After having checked the bedroom, he was sure of two things:

1. Deadpool's mask was gone, meaning he took it with him
2. He had no other leads

He closed his eyes. He knew the reasonable thing was to go home, fall asleep easily, and forget about the whole ordeal—no, it wasn't even an ordeal. Deadpool simply had some business to do; he didn't have to alert Peter every time he went somewhere.

It was just.

Unsettling.

Even when Deadpool had just gone for hot dogs he had left a note. Deadpool had been absent for months at a time previously, but that was when they rarely talked. And of course, his absence lined up perfectly with Swarm's appearance. Peter gave into his anxieties and stayed on the couch for the rest of the night.

Five more days passed with no sign of or contact from Deadpool.

Peter busied himself with work and school, which in itself certainly was not much of a feat. He channeled his frustration into articles about Spider-Man and his supposed wavering morals, which pleased J. Jonah Jameson immensely. His work was nowhere near suffering, but he still felt disconnected from it. The articles weren't how he felt, and the studying was done for distraction purposes. It was noticeably distant.

His patrols felt lonely. Despite being in such a large city and having been accustomed to working solo, it felt odd to go back to it. Due to the excess time, he managed to fit in a lunch with Aunt May, who was delighted at the contact. Peter felt a surge of guilt; perhaps he hadn't been the best nephew lately.

The two spoke about work and school, though Aunt May did attempt to prod about his social life a little too aggressively.

"I'm fine," Peter assured. "Really."

Aunt May sighed and squeezed his hand. "I know, Peter. I just worry."

Peter stayed quiet. He knew; he worried, too.

When he first saw Deadpool it took everything in his power to not run over. He initially had



intended to, but soon realized he was currently Peter Parker, not Spider-Man—though on a technicality it was the same thing. Deadpool was absentmindedly munching on a taco outside a nearby restaurant. Peter forced his gaze down; he'd just have to catch Deadpool tonight.

Peter found himself crouched on the familiar roof later than normal, around 1 AM. Time passed by as Peter diligently kept watch. The city seemed rather peaceful tonight save for a group of drunken teenagers vandalizing a parked truck. They had been surprisingly receptive to Peter's scolding and seemed more confused than malicious.

"Well, if it isn't the neighborhood's friendly Spider-Man."

Peter leaped to his feet, turning toward the noise. A smile threatened to pass his lips. "Wade."

Deadpool nodded. "That's what they call me. Or sometimes Master if they really like me. What's cooking, good looking?"

"I haven't noticed you patrolling much," Peter said. He made an effort to maintain a slightly teasing tone. "You're slacking."

Deadpool waved him off. "Had some business to take care of, it's all good now. Baby's back in the hood. So, what's the stitch on the baddies?"

Peter listed out the single crime he had stumbled upon that night while Deadpool hummed something with the words 'Call me, beep me'. He made a point to not mention Swarm or his threats from earlier in the week. It was something he could take care of himself—something he had *already* taken care of. "It's been a pretty quiet night."

Deadpool stretched out. "Wanna grab some grub, baby boy?"

Peter nodded. "Yeah, that sounds good. Tired of Mexican yet?"

Deadpool snorted. "Who do you take me for?"

"Someone who clearly doesn't care about his health," Peter teased.

Deadpool let out a long sigh. "I guess I did have Mexican for lunch. We can get hot dogs or something."

"Don't sound so eager," Peter said. He flexed his back; it was good to have some normalcy back in his life.

Deadpool eyed him. "You *are* trying to seduce me, Spider-Man. No one stretches like that unless they want a good fuck."

Peter flushed heavily, dropping his arms. "God, Wade. I didn't realize you were an expert on stretches. Please, tell me everything I've been doing wrong, how I've disgraced the art of yoga and that I'll never find love."

"Jeez, Spidey. You're a feisty one."

Deadpool tweaked Peter's nose through the mask and hopped down from the roof. Flustered, Peter hurried after him, shooting a web before Deadpool could hit the ground.

"My hero," Deadpool said with his eyelashes batting. Peter's heart thudded, adrenaline spiking from the only nearly averted disaster.

The two of them sat on an abandoned curb, eating hot dogs and owl watching.

“I saw that Parker kid today,” Deadpool said.

Peter nearly choked on his food. So much for nipping that topic in the bud. He wiped the edge of his mouth before replying with a hoarse voice: “What?”

Deadpool shrugged and dangled his feet into the street. “Saw him nearby while I was grabbing lunch. Guess you got through to him, because the nerd looked like he was about to piss his pants, and just ran off.”

Peter felt a twinge of annoyance; he hadn't been afraid—he was just trying to be inconspicuous. But apparently, Deadpool spotted him anyway. It was odd; the mercenary hadn't even glanced in his direction as far as Peter could tell. “I just told him that he has a good gig and to not mess it up by assuming everyone wants to be photographed.”

Kind of; he supposed he could tell himself that right now.

Deadpool nodded. “He’s a smart kid, but too trusting. Too optimistic.”

Peter shrugged. “You’re too hard on yourself.”

Deadpool managed to give him a dirty leer even through his mask. Peter shoved him. Deadpool swung his body back with the force from the push, crashing into Peter. Peter released a breathy laugh as Deadpool collapsed on top of him.

“You’re paying for my hot dog’s funeral,” Peter said. Two listless dogs lay forlornly in the streets, now covered in grime and bugs. “And I expect at the very least a live band and finger food. Only the best for my fallen brother.”

Deadpool scrunched up his face. “Would it be disrespectful if I served mini hot dogs?”

Peter laughed. It echoed once in the empty street. Deadpool shifted on him before relaxing and letting all his dead weight.

“Oof!” Peter said with a wince at the sudden pressure. “I know I have super strength, but a guy has his limits.”

“But I’m so tired,” Deadpool whined. “Give me a piggyback ride home.”

“Will you stand up if I do?”

Deadpool nodded eagerly. Peter stood up and dusted off his suit; it was in dire need of a wash at this point. He let his eyes linger on the hot dogs. “You owe me, though. For this and my brother.”

Once Deadpool was satisfied with his tight clasp, Peter flung a web up and shot toward the apartment. Peter started to push Deadpool off his waist but was stopped by an iron grip.

“Uh?”

“Shh,” Deadpool replied. “The voices haven’t come to a consensus yet.”

Still carrying Deadpool, Peter waddled over to the couch and collapsed on it. “And this is where you get off my back. Figuratively and literally.”

Deadpool sighed. “Fine. You still hungry? Remember that sandwich from earlier?”

“No thanks,” Peter interrupted. His stomach was still pestering him, but nothing was still better than a sandwich that was potentially as old as him. “Water though, maybe? Took something wicked out of me carrying around your fat ass.”

Deadpool threw a hand to his chest. “This *fat ass* may not be as fantastic as yours, but it certainly pays the bills.” He eyed Peter. “I’m going to force-feed you. I swear it’s not a fetish. You’re just too skinny.”

“I’m fine,” Peter stressed, but Deadpool was already rummaging the kitchen. He returned with a bowl of ramen.

Peter laughed. “How did you know?”

Deadpool looked almost apologetic. “Haven’t been to the store in a while, baby boy. But like you said, I owe you. I’ll take your pretty ass out anywhere it wants. Spaghetti in Italy? Done. You and me in my bedroom? Double done.”

Peter shifted up his mask and ignored Deadpool in favor of warm food. Regardless of the excessive sodium content, his stomach thanked him for it.

“So,” Deadpool said. He fell down on the couch next to Peter. “Since I know you’ve been dying—haha dying; it’ll be funny when I finish my sentence, trust me—to know, my business was just delivering some old mementos to a friend. No fatalities involved. Though he did threaten to slaughter me if I so much as dropped a box. Grumpy old bastard Logan is....”

Peter slurped a noodle. He hadn’t expected Deadpool to even mention the five-day absence, and certainly not to go into detail about it. He looked down at his bowl; it suddenly looked even more appealing with Deadpool’s confession. “I. Thanks, Wade.”

Deadpool waved him off, turning on the television for noise. Peter could hear Deadpool muttering under his breath about being in too deep. Peter did his best to focus on the television instead of intruding on the one-sided conversation, no matter how desperately he wanted to. The rest of ProTech’s season 1 played faintly in the background, though neither man felt up to commentary.

## Chapter 5

Peter woke up to Deadpool standing over him. It probably should have unnerved him more than it did, but perhaps that was what being Spider-man entailed: waking up face-to-face with mercenaries.

Though Deadpool hadn't killed in a while.

Peter didn't expect him to stop; it seemed as ingrained in Deadpool as saving people was in Peter. It was nice, though, to hear that he was making an active effort. The man evidently wasn't who Peter had always characterized him as, though Peter still felt in the dark about the true nature of Deadpool and his past. The frequent muttering under his breath left plenty of questions unanswered, but Peter wasn't sure whether or not he actually wanted to know the answer. He felt like he should be sharing more with Deadpool, in more of a reciprocal relationship—relationship, really Parker?—but the pattern of those he cared about dying was too heavy to risk. Not to mention he couldn't give out much without alerting Deadpool to the fact that he was, in fact, the annoying nerdy boy who had 'run away' the day before.

Peter realized he had been still for a good three minutes while Deadpool stood over him. His mask was still on, so it was unclear whether or not Deadpool actually believed him to be awake.

"Hi," Peter said plainly. He figured the casual approach was best; he wasn't trained in dealing with these types of awkward conversations—other awkward conversations, yes, but never ones that involved this close of physical contact with someone who wasn't trying to kill him. At least he hoped there was truth to the last part.

"You're still here," Deadpool said. His tone was curious, and surprisingly not annoyed. Peter sat up from the couch and pretended to dust off his costume. "You sure are something."

"Uh, sorry," Peter said. He threw the blanket off his legs and stood up. "I'll go right now. Thanks for letting me stay. Not that I really asked. More fell asleep on your couch. Again."

Deadpool said nothing. He sat on the couch and pulled Peter down alongside him. Peter lurched and let out an uneasy noise. Deadpool lifted his mask off and turned to Peter.

Peter smiled at him; it was probably unnoticeable with his mask, though.

"I did show you this, right?"

"Your face? Unless I had an incredibly vivid dream in which I totally called exactly what your face looks like, yes?"

"Then why are you still here?" Deadpool was speaking through his teeth; he sounded enraged, though the tone didn't seem to direct itself at Peter.

"Because I fell asleep and you pulled me back when I tried to leave?" Peter was never good with guessing games, but it sounded to be the wrong answer based on Deadpool's resulting rough laugh.

"Is there some way I can convince you that I'm not a friend to hang around? I'm not a friend, Spidey. *I'm not good people.*"

Peter crossed his arms. "I'm a grown man, Wade. I think I can choose who I want or don't want to be friends with."

Deadpool burst out laughing. “Oh, baby boy you sound adorable. I don’t understand how you maintain that notion that there’s good in everyone, but damn if you’re not a stubborn thing. I wish your creator hadn’t insisted on you being so heterosexual. We would have had mad fans. Not to mention the merchandise...” He sobered. “Honestly, though. Think long and hard—that’s what she said—and ask yourself to think of even one reason why you want to be friends with me. And we’re playing expert mode; you can’t say out of pity or that you don’t know. You’re smarter than that. You’ve just been playing dumb.”

Peter swallowed. He leaned back against the couch; if he was going to be staying there, he figured he may as well get comfortable. He lifted up the bottom of his mask and tucked it just over his nose. “I guess it’s a couple of reasons. I know you won’t believe me, but I do think you’re a good person. People are... complex. There’s more to life than good and bad, and bad people can have good qualities and good people can have bad qualities. And I see you as the latter. Yeah, you’ve done a lot you might regret—and you might not even regret it—but who can say they haven’t? There’s so much I would give to have acted differently if I could, but the real significance is how you deal with it. I deal with it by helping people, by being Spider-Man and trying my best to stay responsible. You were dealt a pretty crap hand, and you’ve dealt with it by killing and cracking jokes at your own expense. But you’ve been handling it differently lately. I guess that says enough to me.”

Deadpool watched him silently. His mask was gripped tightly in his hand. His eyes were narrowed, full of skepticism and revealing the slimmest glimmer of receptivity. He looked eager to intercept but was holding himself back. Peter wondered when Deadpool had last heard words of this magnitude. Based on his reaction, it had been quite some time.

“And I do see good in you. It might not be at the forefront, but it’s there.” Peter coughed. His words were spilling out like vomit. “But I guess that doesn’t entirely answer your question. I think you’re funny, too, even if I do groan at half your jokes—that’s how you know they’re good. Your humor is a bit... crude at times, but it’s witty. I think your stories and thoughts are interesting, and, well, they make me think. I’m not saying I’m about to go all Anakin on the city, but I do respect your opinion and perspective. It certainly gives me lots to think about. You’re also protective; I know I can count on you to help me defend when things go wrong. And you’ve never asked me for help. I know you joke about it, but I also know if I said a strong no you’d accept it and stop bothering me. But we both know what we do is just a back and forth.”

“Baby boy,” Deadpool started in a warning tone.

Peter held his hand up. “You know that’s true. I’m not lying to you, so the least you can do is grant me the same treatment.”

“You’re an idiot,” Deadpool said, and his voice sounded strained. “A reckless idiot. Maybe more than I am. You think any good can come from being around me?”

Peter shrugged. “I’m not friends with people for what they can give me. Besides. It’s usually me giving this talk; I don’t attract the safest people. But, I...I like that I know you’ll be there. You have to be there.”

Deadpool couldn’t die, not formally. He could hold his own and Peter didn’t have to stay awake at night worrying about his safety or the consequences of being seen with Spider-Man. He was concrete—there was no fear of him slipping from Peter’s tenuous grip. He was the tangible example of complete security, of not being alone. Peter didn’t have to be alone. Was it selfish? He felt a thread of guilt from his thoughts; Deadpool’s immortality was a sure fire way to stabilize Peter’s constant state of dread, but was it really fair to the mercenary? Peter knew all too well how

it felt to be used for status, but his feelings toward Deadpool's healing factor seemed slightly more harmless. Or maybe he was just lying to himself.

Peter reached his hand out toward Deadpool but was cut off.

"You should go," Deadpool said gruffly. Peter drew back his hand reluctantly; it was a stupid move in the first place, but he had wanted it enough to ignore his brain's warnings. Deadpool stood up and stalked toward the kitchen. Peter, remaining silent and stubbornly on the couch, picked up Deadpool's mask. It was odd seeing it without the trademark leer or wiggling eyebrows. "Are you fucking deaf?"

Peter whipped his head around. Deadpool was hunched over, squeezing his head with both hands. The man appeared to be in excruciating pain with no visible cause. "Wade?"

Deadpool flinched and staggered to the counter. He was mumbling angrily under his breath, keeping one hand clutched to his temple. His other hand scrambled around before finding the desired tool—a sharp knife—and plunging it into his abdomen. He grunted, stumbling against the counter as he blindly reached for stability.

"Stop!" Peter cried. In seconds he was standing over Deadpool, trying to cover the wound with his shaking hands. Peter let Deadpool slide down the cabinets until he was sitting with his back against one of the kitchen drawers. Crouched over, Peter grabbed any nearby objects resembling towels or cloth and pushed it against the wound. "Why do you keep *doing* this?"

Deadpool shuddered against the pressure on his side. His eyes were closed. "Maybe if I do it enough you'll actually leave. The voices do, for a little while."

"What voices?" Peter asked quietly. Deadpool had mentioned them previously, but that conversation ended as quickly as it started. "It's just us here."

"Yellow and white," Deadpool said promptly, as though it explained all the answers in the known universe.

"I'm... not quite following."

"Weapon X fucked me up real good, Spidey. Left me not only with these fugly physical scars but those shitty mental ones too. They never shut up, not unless I make them. It's short-lived, but it's something."

Peter sat down next to Deadpool, determinedly holding the now stained-beyond-repair dishtowel to the wound. The knife was still grotesquely burrowed into the left side of Deadpool's torso. The blood was spilling onto Peter's gloves and the floor. It was nauseating, but the warmth of the blood and the strong smell of copper made him more scared than disgusted. He didn't think he could handle watching Deadpool die again—especially not in such close proximity. "So, are they talking right now?"

"Screaming," Deadpool said. He opened his eyes and stared distantly at the wall sitting opposite of the two. Peter pressed the towel and himself closer, needing the stable contact. He felt the pulse of the wound and Deadpool's heart, and it meant life, but it also meant death, and nothing seemed right anymore. "Yellow is mocking my face and white is scolding me for talking to you about this."

"Is there... anything I can do to help stop them?" The explanation, albeit making very little sense on its own, made a lot of prior encounters much more understandable. Peter could admit to talking

to himself from time to time, but at least he had an off switch. It seemed like Deadpool's own lack of filter was a trait he shared in common with the voices.

"Take the knife out," Deadpool said. Peter hesitated; was that really the best course of action? "Then shoot me."

Peter bit his lip. Every part of him was insisting he panic, but with Deadpool in such a state, it could mean danger if Peter let rationality fly out of the window as well. He shifted to face the mercenary, keeping one hand on the towel and resting his other hand on Deadpool's shoulder. "Wade, I'm not going to shoot you. I'll just. Let me clean you up."

"Stop," Deadpool said, his voice uncharacteristically defeated. "Stop pretending to care."

Peter pretended not to hear him. His breathing wavered but he played it off as a low cough. "This is going to hurt. But if you want I can ramble about something to distract you from the pain. You've probably heard me go on about ProTech enough as it is, plus no spoilers like you said. Is it spoilers if it's just my prediction but I haven't actually seen the episode yet? Because if I'm right I'll feel simultaneously proud and guilty for ruining it for you."

Peter let his mind and mouth wander as he grasped the knife tightly and pulled out. Deadpool grunted. Peter immediately covered the now open wound with the towel.

"Okay I'm glad that's over because I was running out of nonsense to talk about," Peter said. "You're markedly better at that than I am. Any tips for a newbie?"

Deadpool shifted. "Yeah, just one. Get the fuck out of my apartment."

Peter nodded. "See, I've heard that one before, but my views don't quite align with it. I think instead of that I'll help you to the bed."

Peter gently lifted Deadpool from the floor, being overly cautious to avoid touching his left side. He was halfway to the bedroom when Deadpool spoke.

"Couch."

Peter nodded. "Couch it is! First tip I agree with. Please don't make that into a sexual joke."

"I don't need to," Deadpool chuckled. "You did fine yourself. The student is becoming the master...bater"

Peter rolled his eyes and placed Deadpool on the couch. "So. Since you promoted me to dinner decider with incapacitating yourself and whatnot, I pick staying in and ordering pizza."

Deadpool nodded. "As long as it's pineapple olive."

Peter jumped away, leaving Deadpool silent on the couch. When he returned, he settled himself down and stretched languidly. He made a point to sit on Deadpool's right side. "I'm surprised you didn't put up more of a fuss about not having tacos. Or throw me out of your apartment window for still being here."

"I'm too tired to be grumpy. Daddy's gotta fill his stomach before he can wax beautifully depressing poetry or throw twinkies somewhere that isn't a bed."

"Well," Peter said quietly. "I'm glad."

Deadpool glanced over at him. “You’re right, white. He might actually have surpassed my level of insanity. I’m thoroughly impressed. He’s crazy smart and also regular crazy. Maybe he’s the Spider-Man who actually made the web slingers instead of supposedly having small holes appear in his wrists in what was a total cop-out.”

Peter fiddled with his web slingers. “I mean. I built them, yes. I’m not aware of any holes in my wrists. I feel like that’s something a guy notices.”

“Depends how he’s using it,” Deadpool said with a wink. There was a beat of silence. “So do you think Kenneth is going to finally fuck Maria?”

“That was a blunt way of putting it,” Peter remarked. He felt the beat of his heart slowly returning to a more stable speed with each additional sign of normalcy. “But yeah, I imagine they’ll start dating at least within the next two episodes.”

“Maria’s my idol,” Deadpool mumbled. “Second fictional character I’d do, after you of course.”

“Uh, yeah. Thanks for that.”

Deadpool glanced over. “You know you don’t have to do this, right?”

“Shh,” Peter said. “I’m ignoring all comments that aren’t related to ProTech, pizza, or the fact that I can kick your ass in any of those video games by the television.”

Deadpool gave him an incredulous look. “Baby boy, are you challenging me to Mario Kart? Because you’ve told me you *don’t* want me to fucking destroy that ass. I mean, if you insist, I’ll gladly rip you a new one. And I won’t even laugh that much when you beg me to kiss it better.”

“Don’t worry,” Peter said. “Plenty of New York will line up to kiss my ass.”

Deadpool whistled. “I’d be first in line.”

Peter smiled. “You just said I’d have to beg you for it.”

Deadpool looked conflicted. “I didn’t think this plan through.” He narrowed his eyes. “You’re trying to distract me by using psychological assfare.”

“I’m really not,” Peter said dryly. “You just have ass on your mind, which is nothing new.”

“Guilty as charged,” Deadpool said with a sigh. “So are you offering...?”

“Video games,” Peter said; Deadpool easily followed, setting up the console and throwing a controller at the couch. Peter caught it sharply.

“You have to be Luigi,” Deadpool announced as soon as the character screen appeared. Peter quirked up an eyebrow.

“I have to be?”

“Yes,” Deadpool said as though talking to a child. “Because I’m always Mario, and they’re a team like us.”

Peter snorted and scrolled along, purposely making a show of skipping over Luigi. “What if I want to be Princess Peach?”

Deadpool considered it. “Love interest; I’ll take it.”



“Never mind,” Peter said. “I’ll just be Yoshi.”

Deadpool waggled his eyebrows. “I ride you.”

Peter let out a groan. “My God is there any character I can be without you ruining it?”

“Probably not,” Deadpool admitted.

Peter ended up picking Petey Piranha, though he was bummed he couldn’t receive a laugh in return without compromising his identity.

“WAIT.”

Peter put down his controller. “Yes?”

“Let’s double up on the same cart!”

“Doesn’t that completely defeat the purpose of fighting against each other?”

“But I wanna ride with you,” Deadpool whined.

The two ended up in the same cart, though Peter put up quite a fight. He eventually conceded though he asked for versus for the last three matches, and that he would be the one to drive. Deadpool was reckless just using the items, so Peter was relieved the mercenary didn’t insist on driving. As the two were crossing the finish line and high-fiving, the doorbell rang. Peter immediately jumped up and jogged to the door.

The delivery boy nodded appreciatively. “Nice cosplay.”

“Thanks, man,” Peter said. He made a point to tip extra for the comment, despite his dwindling money supply.

“I give it a 2 out of 10,” Deadpool called from the couch. “‘Cause that ass is too good.”

The delivery boy flushed red, quickly collected his money, and left. Peter sighed in faux annoyance, though the smile on his face negated any such claim.

The two took a break from the game to eat pizza, though Peter eventually had to turn off the console when Deadpool kept trying to sneakily start games. He seemed to think he was a lot more subtle than he actually was.

“How’s the side?” Peter asked after a few slices of pizza.

Deadpool checked. “Healed. You know, you really didn’t have to bother with it.” Before Peter could retort, Deadpool continued: “But thanks.”

Peter shrugged. “Even if it heals, that kind of thing still hurts. Really though; you should stop with the whole injuring yourself. It’s... unsettling being on this end of it. I can only imagine what it feels like from yours.”

“I’m used to it,” Deadpool said. His voice had lost any prior semblance of emotion. Peter grimaced, looking down at his nearly forgotten slice of pizza. He decidedly pushed it away and grabbed his controller, flicking the console back on. He scooted closer and pressed his left side flush against Deadpool’s right side. It almost felt as though there was a stutter in time.

“Uhh... Spidey?”

“Come on,” Peter said. He swallowed back his nerves, which prickled at the tips of his fingers and the flush of his cheeks. His skin, albeit underneath a suit, burned scorching hot. The press of thin spandex against spandex was sinuously novel, and the heat radiating from Deadpool’s body made his toes curl. He willed his mind elsewhere. “We never got to versus. I mean, if you want to admit defeat....”

“Never!” Deadpool yelled. He knocked Peter’s controller out of his hand and reached for the other, quickly trying to start the game. Peter webbed the controller’s stick rigid with the hand he hadn’t removed his glove from. Deadpool looked at him with a stunned expression.

“Spidey... you fight dirty,” he said.

“So do you,” Peter shot back.

“Yeah, but you’re the *good* guy,” Deadpool stressed. “Next you’re going to be stealing houses and burning down money.”

“Because that’s where the slippery slope of criminal behavior starts: webbing a controller.”

Deadpool nodded earnestly. “I’m glad you can admit this. Acceptance is the first step.”

The two played for a tad longer until Peter finally came out ahead, after Deadpool had pushed the out of 3 to out of 5, then out of 9.

Peter yawned. It must have been at least 10 by that point. He *had* grown accustomed to late nights, but his body had a tendency to grumble and fight his schedule at every opportunity. “Face it; I’m better than you. Man, we’ve been playing for a while. You want to go back to watching ProTech?”

“Them’s the words of a coward,” Deadpool said gruffly but relented. The two had reached season 2 already, and Deadpool put on the second episode.

The night quieted down and Peter absently wondered when it had become so normal for him to spend the night. If he was being realistic, he’d have to start being more consistently reliable at work. J. Jonah Jameson was not enjoying his recent sporadic schedule. It didn’t help that a majority of his time was spent at Deadpool’s apartment—away from his camera and the life of Peter Parker. The day he had slept 10 hours had been a Monday, too; he was surprised he hadn’t been fired when he walked in the next day. Jameson had been seconds away from doing so, he could tell, but The Bugle really couldn’t afford to find another photographer of Spider-Man—at least not one who was paid so poorly.

Not to mention Swarm; Peter hadn’t seen him since that odd night but didn’t put it past the villain to either show himself again or find another avenue of pestering Spider-Man. The police force was decent at its best and dreadfully ineffective at its worst. Normally he’d be concerned about a civilian being targeted, but Peter Parker was no regular civilian and was certainly not one who needed protection. He hesitated when it came to telling Deadpool about the situation, though, especially with the man’s irregular behavior when it came to Peter. He half expected Deadpool to go ahead himself and shoot Peter Parker to expedite the process and destroy any upper hand Swarm may have had. Swarm said Deadpool was keen on protecting him, but he knew better than to trust what villains had to say, and Deadpool’s responses to Peter hadn’t been positive.

He wished he knew what Swarm meant by the way Deadpool looked at him, though; it was purposely vague, enough so that it lingered on Peter’s mind as Swarm hoped it would. Perhaps he did have a chance at integrating Peter Parker into Deadpool’s life. He was balanced on a thin line between wanting to wedge both his lives into Deadpool’s, but also resenting the potential pitfalls

that could arise from it. As rewarding as being Spider-Man could be, Peter resented a lot about the occupation. He always ended up only able to extend a portion of his true self, lest another person get wrapped up in the whirlwind of superhero life. And in the case of Deadpool, he wasn't willing to risk linking crime and fighting to Aunt May.

Nothing was worth risking the safety of Aunt May; he understood that sentiment far too well. There was a chance that Deadpool would leave Aunt May out of it, but even the association of her with any sort of superpower-related nonsense was a dangerous game to play.

He sighed; it was fun to play, but he really needed to get caught up with work, both as Peter and as Spider-Man. Deadpool looked over at him, curious at the noise. Peter shook his head, which was enough for the other man, who went back to watching the show. Peter leaned over and rested his head on Deadpool's shoulder. The mercenary stiffened, but otherwise didn't react. Peter allowed himself a small smile. He didn't really know what he was doing or where this all was going, but maybe it was okay for once.

Maybe he could allow himself to be happy.

## Chapter 6

Peter woke first the next morning. The sun was bright but it looked to still be early. He glanced to his side where Deadpool slept; he looked abnormally relaxed. Peter smiled. He hesitated before rolling his mask back down. After giving Deadpool's forehead a quick kiss, he hopped out of the window and swung away, his face flushed red and his heart pounding.

It was tough to concentrate that day; Peter's mind was swarming like bees. His brain was simultaneously scolding him, congratulating him, and calculating how much it would cost to move halfway across the world. His brain replayed the kiss, leaving him in a pit of confusion and nausea. He was trying to tell himself it was unprompted and mere curiosity going too far, but he had little confidence in the theory. On the way to work, he had snapped a few pictures, though he knew J.J. Jameson would be infuriated that there weren't any action shots. It would at least tide him over until he could get more, however. Of course, photography and work were the last things on his mind.

He tapped out a portion of an article, willing the clock to go faster. When the clock hit 7, he inwardly cheered. He eagerly jogged along the sidewalk before coming to a stop in front of a familiar hot dog stand. He had been veering toward Deadpool's apartment but remembered he was in civilian clothing, not to mention carrying his camera and pictures of Spider-Man. He sighed, redirecting himself toward his own apartment. To be fair, Deadpool had never told him to come back after work—did Deadpool even know he worked?—but Deadpool had also said he was welcome any time.

Peter shooed the thoughts away as he entered the building and hurried up the stairs. Changing into his Spider-Man costume, he paused. It would be a good idea to eat at some point, but there wasn't much left. He rummaged through the kitchen cupboards and settled on two hardened granola bars. As he was internally weighing the pros and cons of visiting Deadpool unannounced, a realization hit him; he was somehow in a crazy universe in which he had acquired Deadpool's number. He fished his phone out of his pocket and stared at it. It stared back at him, mockingly. After a good three minutes, he finally gave in and sent what he hoped looked like a casual and not-at-all-eager text.

**Hey Wade, is it cool if I come over? - Spider-Man**

The reply was instantaneous:

**new phone who dis**

**JK SPIDEY GET UR CUTE BUTT OVER HERE!!!!111**

Peter huffed, a smile passing his lips involuntarily. He ate the granola bars quickly as he swung to Deadpool's apartment. Yeah, he could have walked, but there wasn't as much fun in that. He figured it would look odd to see Spider-Man walking around the streets of New York while smiling at his phone like a dork. Not that he didn't normally look like a dork—well, at least in the Spider-Man costume he had some semblance of mystery if nothing else.

The window, as predicted, was open a sliver. Peter heaved himself in, peering around the room. He didn't see Deadpool, but he immediately heard the man.

He was standing in the kitchen, singing loudly and making what appeared to be enchiladas. The kitchen itself was thrown awry, but the food's smell made up for it.

“Not feeling pancakes, huh?” Peter collapsed on the couch—God, that thing was heavenly. He wondered if Deadpool would mind if he asked for shared custody of it.

Deadpool scoffed. “Who do you think I am? A man who can’t make Mexican is hardly a man at all. Pancakes are good, but they’re not going to woo a spider.”

“I don’t think spiders are sentient enough to understand the process of wooing,” Peter said. “And they probably don’t care much for enchiladas.”

“Well, then they’re stupid,” Deadpool said. He threw a finished enchilada at Peter, who thankfully was able to catch it with his fast reflexes. “And you better eat that unless you’re actually a giant spider under there. Is that why you never show your face? Ashamed of the hair and eight beady eyes?”

“Wade, you’ve seen the lower half of my face dozens of times,” Peter said. The enchilada was still steaming, though Peter disregarded such a fact. His suit was going to be a mess after tonight.

“Not your eyes,” Deadpool pointed out. “So maybe you’re really into shaving. You don’t gotta shave to impress me, doll.”

“Good,” Peter said with a snort. “Because I don’t. I’d rather have my wicked beard.”

“What beard? You’re as hairless as a baby’s ass.”

“Hey,” Peter protested. “It’s a work in progress.”

“You should work harder,” Deadpool said. He snickered. “Heh, harder.”

Peter rolled his eyes. “So, any reason for the spontaneous enchiladas?”

“Is there ever a reason necessary other than the fact that they’re enchiladas?”

“I guess not,” Peter said. He was nearly finished with his; it was surprisingly tasty.

“Had to make sure dinner was on the table when my honey got home from work! Don’t want you to beat my ass or anything.”

Peter paused. “Wait. You didn’t have to cook just because I was coming over.”

Deadpool shrugged. “Figured you didn’t have much today.”

Peter’s stomach growled in response. He narrowed his eyes at it; traitor. Deadpool soon plopped down on the couch next to him, holding a tray of at least a dozen more enchiladas.

“That’s... impressive,” Peter said finally. “Thank you.”

“I dress to impress,” Deadpool said. He tugged proudly on his apron.

“You succeed,” Peter said fondly as he reached for another piece. “You up for some patrolling tonight?”

Deadpool was quiet; he stared out the window.

‘It’s a miracle,’ Peter thought, filing away to memory the exact sentence necessary to silence Deadpool. His fingers itched to lay a placating hand on the mercenary.

“No,” Deadpool finally said.

Wait what.

“No?” Peter repeated.

“A little birdie told me the Avengers have been prowling about tonight. They’re not the fondest of my ‘wham bam thank you ma’am’ tactics. Figured they can handle it on their own.”

Peter stayed quiet. He had always thought Deadpool to be eagerly awaiting a chance to team up with the Avengers. He wondered what changed. Perhaps the Avengers had warned him to stay away, or the mercenary’s rose-tinted glasses finally fell white. It was odd, but Peter almost felt flattered that Deadpool was eager to patrol with him and only him. “Okay. Night off, then. You feel like losing at more video games?”

Deadpool scoffed. “Nah, baby boy. If we’ve got the night, we’re doing it my way.”

“That’s not ominous at all,” Peter muttered.

“Golden Girls,” Deadpool said simply and shot up from the couch to grab the remote. “I know you like your nerdy shows, but it’s time to show you what real television is.”

“You *like* ProTech,” Peter said, finding himself unable to keep a slightly hurt tone out of his voice. Watch him introduce Deadpool to anything ever again.

“There are levels, Spidey,” Deadpool explained, condescension edging through. “You’ve got the basics like Teen Mom at the bottom, then comes generic comedy shows, then nerd shows, then B rated movies, and then Golden Girls at the very top. Well, right behind my movie.”

“Right,” Peter said slowly. “Your movie. Remind me not to ask you to ever play it.”

Deadpool erupted into a snorting laugh. “It’s not a porno. Well. I am naked in it, but it’s brief, I swear. Gotta get that fan service in.”

“So Golden Girls,” Peter interrupted. “That sounds good.”

It was okay, he supposed. Sophia scared him a little, but he also felt a fond sense of grandmotherly vibes coming from her. It certainly didn’t fit what he thought Deadpool would enjoy, but the man had always been a bit of an enigma. There were probably a lot of things Peter was wrong about in regards to him, which, he distantly realized somewhat bothered him. Why did it bother him? He had more important things to be obsessing over. It wasn’t as though the mercenary hid much about himself—save for his backstory, which changed every time he told it—but Peter wondered how much of his personality was merely for show, and how much of the actual Deadpool he knew. He knew of Deadpool’s uncomfortably common suicidal escapades, and what appeared to be two voices inside his head, but it still left a significant amount unaccounted for.

Halfway through the third episode and Deadpool’s endless streams of commentary—Peter was quickly losing count, as it all mixed together in plot and jokes—he shifted around in his seat and huffed.

Deadpool sent him a raised eyebrow which looked suspiciously close to a leer. “You got a wedgie or something? Feel free to pick at it. I promise to only look and not touch.”

“That Parker kid,” Peter started. The cheery atmosphere dropped like a brick, and a wave of unease fell over the apartment.

Deadpool narrowed his eyes. “You seem to like him a lot. This kid your boyfriend?”

Peter sputtered. “What? No!”

Deadpool sighed. “Damn. I was hoping that was why you weren’t responding to my courting attempts.” He stretched his back. “So what about him? He come crying to you that I gave him a mean look?”

Peter swallowed back the lump in his throat. “Actually, uh. He wanted to know more about you.”

Silence overtook the room.

“WTF?” Deadpool said, his face twisting up beneath his mask. “Like what? I’m not exactly a hidden figure. You could probably find my porno easily—movie, sorry.”

Peter shrugged. “Motivations and whatnot. Backstory, who you are, general information. He wanted to write an uhh, article on you.”

“And you definitely told him to stay away?”

Peter nodded. “He’s persistent. Isn’t deterred from what I told him. I uh, I could be the messenger? That way you don’t have to actually interact with him. Just talk to me and I can report back.”

Deadpool stared him down. “What is your major malfunction, Spidey? What the fuck are you getting out of this? You’re letting this nerd take advantage of you.”

Face flushing, Peter squirmed on the couch. “He’s not. I’m... close to him.”

“And you’re doing this out of the kindness of your heart?”

Peter’s chest stuttered at the sarcastic tone. It felt like a punch. “Wade....”

Deadpool shook his head, scoffing. “Right. Some people are actually just good guys. Then there’s me. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride.”

Peter huffed. “Dude, you’ve got to stop listening to those voices of yours. They’re totally wrong and kind of assholes.”

Deadpool amicably bumped Peter’s shoulder with a fist. “You’re a good kid. I’d still totally wreck that ass. So for real though—does this Parker kid have a complete boner for me? I mean, I wouldn’t blame him, but he’s a bit nerdy for my tastes. Pretty young looking, too. I wonder if he’s graduated middle school.”

Peter grimaced. “He’s twenty-two, for the record.” He shook his head and hands. “That’s not the point. Wait. Too nerdy? What’s wrong with nerdy?”

Deadpool laughed. “Oh, baby boy. You don’t need to defend your boyfriend to me. Just tell him he’s an idiot for even looking in my direction. I could have killed him.”

Peter scoffed. “You wouldn’t have, though.” His heart thumped; he hoped. There was little in the world he wanted more than for his initial impression of Deadpool to have been wrong.

Deadpool eyed him. “How would you know?”

Peter looked away. Eventually, he said softly, “You’re not a killer. Not—not now. You’ve been doing well. I, uh. I’m proud of you.”

Deadpool's shoulders dropped. "I... really?"

"Of course," Peter said candidly. "I don't have a reason not to be."

"Thanks for that," Deadpool said. His tone was awkward but grateful. He rubbed his neck. "Yeah. Thanks."

Peter swallowed the persistent lump taking refuge in his throat. He patted Deadpool's shoulder tersely.

"So," Deadpool started after a few uncomfortably quiet seconds. "Do you get off on being abused and then coddled or something? Because I'm pretty sure I've two-faced you at least a dozen times by now."

"You're not a bad guy," Peter said. "I... Mood swings are easy. They make sense, and, well, they're not permanent." He unconsciously curled in on himself, his mind threatening to stray to more dangerous thoughts. "I can handle that. Besides, I get it. It sucks—life sucks. Sometimes it's impossible to avoid remembering that, and you do what you can to get past it. It's not necessarily good things, but it eventually gets you past it."

Deadpool was quiet. "Huh. Didn't take you for a philosophy fanatic, Spidey."

Peter shrugged. "I've had a lot of time to think about what I could have done differently." A lot of time, and a lot of regrets.

"You?" Deadpool let out a startled laugh. "You're a good guy, you already do everything right."

Smiling sadly, Peter shook his head. "I wish that were true. I really do."

Had he been raised slightly different, he might have turned out to be a villain rather than a hero. He mulled over the thought; it was an uncomfortable one to have. It traced cracks in his foundation of good, attributing his beliefs to his upbringing rather than the mind and morality that grew inherently inside him. The realization was like a jolt, though. Had he tip-toed the same fine line Deadpool had, only to come out on the better side because of his Aunt and Uncle? There were so many stressors in both their lives, ones similar and dissimilar, but their paths had diverged greatly in the end. Peter had found stable footing in his role as nephew and hero, while Deadpool never had the fortune of establishing a balance between civilian and mutant. Peter wondered if he could change that—if he could smooth over the scars Deadpool had accumulated over a lifetime, both physical and mental. In all honesty, he was likely giving himself too much credit. He considered himself a rather fair and moral person, sure, but his thoughts of being in a sense Deadpool's savior teetered on the brink of self-righteousness.

Deadpool *had* chosen his path. While not completely there in sanity, the mercenary was not incapable of making his own decisions. Peter had no right to take away Deadpool's choices in his life, but perhaps just maybe he could offer a second chance—a fork in the once one-way street.

Deadpool waved a hand in his face. "You still there?"

"Y-yeah. Just thinking." Peter sunk down into the folds of the couch and glanced over at the man; he had removed his mask during Peter's inner monologue and was looking stuck between relief and regret. Peter knew that feeling all too well. His own mask was still rolled up expertly just above his nose. He had found himself leaving it up more often than not around the man. It was something, right? He couldn't help but feel shame at the fact that he knew Deadpool's identity and had for a while, whereas the most he could bring himself to do was show his mouth and nose.



Deadpool understood, of course, but it was the principle of it. But he couldn't risk it—not yet; he was too much of a coward.

“Whatcha thinking about?” Deadpool batted his eyes.

“Something stupid,” Peter said weakly. He briefly wondered if Deadpool was able to read minds.

“Oh please,” Deadpool said with a roll of his eyes. “You’re too much of a nerd to have stupid thoughts.”

“I’m definitely not,” Peter said. “Though I appreciate the sentiment.”

“I appreciate *your* sentiment.”

Peter offered him a pained smile. “That one didn’t work, like, at all.”

Deadpool pouted. “Can you give me a consolation prize? A brojob, maybe?”

“Sorry, I’m more of a homie guy myself.”

“Y’know, it’s okay to allow yourself to stop being a dork for like, five seconds. No one’s gonna arrest that ass for anything other than being TOO FINE. For realsies, though; you’ve got some nice DSL.”

“What’s that, the cousin to pumpkin spice lattes?” Peter relaxed on the couch; the conversation had strayed far away from the point, but he felt more comfortable with salacious innuendos than he did with his dreary and brooding thoughts. Sure, he had a tragic backstory, but he wasn’t ready to become Batman or anything.

“Dick sucking lips, honey. Much, *much* better than a latte.”

Peter snorted. “Kids these days and their dang acronyms.”

Deadpool groaned. “Spidey, you sound twelve.”

“Oh come on, at least give me fifteen. Heck, I’ve already got one foot in the grave.”

He snorted. “Then I may as well be six feet under. Speaking of, maybe that’s what it would take to get a good night’s sleep around here.”

Peter furrowed his eyebrows. “You haven’t been sleeping well?”

“See these scars under my eyes?” Peter watched as Deadpool traced the dips below his eye. “These ain’t scars—they’re bags.”

Peter cracked a smile. “I see. I can head home if you need your beauty rest.”

He didn’t want to leave—he never did, anymore—but Deadpool’s sleep was more important than Peter’s growing desire to spend all waking and non-waking time with the once mercenary.

Deadpool looked uncomfortable. “I mean, the last two nights—y’know. Right?”

“I... gathered absolutely nothing of value from that sentence,” Peter admitted. “I’m going to need more verbs and nouns.”

Deadpool sighed and dragged his hands down his face. “Jesus, he’s gonna make me say it. No,

white, I ain't whipped, you piece of shit."

"Wade?"

He dropped his hands to his lap and gave Peter a weary glance. "The last two nights haven't been as bad. It's easier to sleep when you... Ahh fuck. Look, it's stupid. I shouldn't be letting my guard down at night anyway."

"Everybody sleeps," Peter said, omitting the fact that he too shared that fear.

"That the sequel to 'Everybody poops'?"

"Wade," Peter said softly. He grabbed one of Deadpool's hands and brought it back to his own. It felt warm, radiating heat just slightly through his gloves. It was nice. Slipping one of his hands away, he pulled off the glove with his teeth and tossed it to the floor. He placed the bare hand on-top of Deadpool's.

Deadpool looked stunned. "Shit, baby boy, that was hot. You wanna do that with the rest of your suit?"

"Wade," Peter repeated and squeezed his hand. "I can stay here, at nights, I mean. If you need me to. I know what it's like at night, alone in an apartment. Every noise gets to you. I mean, me. And maybe also you. I can take the couch, though. It's really comfy, anyway...."

"You're rambling," Deadpool said, but he was smiling.

Peter coughed. "Right, sorry. But uh, I can be here, yeah?"

Perhaps it wasn't the typical progression of a friendship, but Peter's life had stopped being typical long ago.

"Uh, DUH," Deadpool said with a scoff. "What kind of person would I be if I passed up letting SPIDER-MAN sleep at my place? Iron Man, that's who, because he's stupid."

"Right," Peter said with a laugh. "So, 'nother sleepover?"

"You know it. But there's no way I'm demoting you to the couch. You get to sleep in my chamber."

"You make it sound fancier than it deserves. I've seen all the pairs of underwear on the ground."

Deadpool looked affronted. "Excuse me, are you raiding my pantry drawer? How scandalous!"

"Ground, Wade. As in, I almost stepped in them. It's also a little weird that you have underwear with my face on it."

"Just waiting for the real thing," Deadpool said wistfully. "Gotta practice having your face on my crotch without blowing my load right then and there!"

"I'm... going to pretend I didn't hear that," Peter said. Glancing down, he realized he was still gripping Deadpool's hand. He let go with reluctance, feeling as though he no longer had a viable excuse to touch him. He cleared his throat. "So. Did you want to call it?"

"It's like ten!" Peter stared at him. "Yes."

Peter laughed. He stood up and stretched. The ache in his muscles ran deep; sitting all day did not

bode well with his posture. “Man, yeah I could definitely use some rest.”

“Just as a warning, I go commando.”

“Yeah, no,” Peter said. “At the very least boxers or briefs, or no go.”

Deadpool let out a long, suffering sigh. “Fine. The things I do for you, Spidey. But they’re gonna have your face on it. You want a pair?”

“I’m good,” Peter said. “I like wearing my face on my face.”

“You gonna wear that mask while you sleep?”

Peter shrugged. “I’ve done it before. Here, even. I’m really used to it.”

“Suit yourself,” Deadpool said. “Get it? Cause you’re in your suit?”

Peter granted him a small chuckle and headed toward the bedroom, which, in retrospect, sounded so out of place coming from him. Deadpool followed him easily, turning off the main light in the process. Only the dim, flickering bathroom light remained. It was intent on casting shadows across Deadpool’s face. Peter did his best to ignore it in favor of reacquainting himself with the bedroom. The room looked akin to the last time he had visited, save for a couple more guns thrown about. “You really need to clean your room at some point.”

“The guns and underwear add character!”

Peter waved him off. “I need to start bringing a toothbrush or something.”

Deadpool went quiet. He looked conflicted, but not interested in giving an explanation, so Peter brushed it off and tugged him toward the bed. Deadpool’s voice was weak: “Never thought you’d be dragging me to my bed. Not outside my dreams and highly realistic hallucinations, that is.”

“Riiight, well. I’m just going to go to sleep.” Peter slouched down onto the bed, feeling the soft sink of the mattress ease his weary muscles. He dropped Deadpool’s hand and watched him carefully.

Deadpool was still without his mask but covered everywhere else. His eyes raked down Peter’s body; Peter returned a nervous smile.

“Want a striptease, baby boy?”

“I’m good,” Peter said dryly. He leaned back onto the pillow and shifted to face the other wall. There were small cracks and crevices decorating it that Peter tried to map with his eyes. He heard the quiet shuffles of undressing and immediately lost count. Despite his previous refusal, he felt a shiver of curiosity rattle through him. He focused his attention on the nearby bedside table, which was covered in some old receipts, a tangled phone charger, and—and a framed picture of Peter Parker?

He swallowed, his throat constricting with shock. How and why did Deadpool have a picture of him *as Peter*? His heart thumped rapidly, but more with anticipation than fear. He would have thought his Spidey sense would go off if he were in palpable danger, which meant that it was likely Deadpool presented no actual threat. Even still, it was odd to lie face to face with a picture of himself. He chewed on his bottom lip while he considered his options. Eventually, he decided on feigning sleepy discomfort and shifting back to face Deadpool. Deadpool was stripped down to just his boxers, of which were incidentally Spider-Man themed as promised. Most of his body was

covered by shadows, leaving only the faintest sculpture of his body. More than ever, Peter was thankful for his mask's ability to hide where his eyes wandered. And because of that, he greedily took in the sight before him. He had never questioned that Deadpool was in shape, but he had also never directly faced the fact.

He wasn't sure what to make of his thoughts, other than a persistent and obscene desire that clutched desperately at him. As if sensing the inner conflict, Deadpool's eyes locked onto Peter's. Peter held his breath, lying as still as humanely—and mutantly—possible. He couldn't bring himself to close his eyes, though, and shut out the emotion trickling from the man next to him. Following a brief silence, Deadpool let out a lazy sigh and clobbered off, presumably to shut off the sole remaining light.

Peter flung himself onto his back, lungs overworked and breath strangled. His chest heaved in tandem with his startled heart. He was painfully aware of the skin-tight suit he donned. He shut his eyes, unable to fathom the reality of the situation. He was exhausted, as he so frequently was, but his body was stubbornly insistent on staying awake and on edge.

He woke up to blankets being shuffled around. He blinked in the darkness; he must have fallen asleep while Deadpool was roaming. He glanced to his side, watching as Deadpool carefully climbed into bed. The bed groaned under the sudden added weight. Peter studied Deadpool, who was completely still. Almost disappointed, Peter inched closer; he had initially expected Deadpool to plaster his body against Peter as he so often joked about. The bed dipped between the two, establishing a narrow barrier that shrunk with each additional shift.

Deadpool let out a quiet "Fuck" under his breath. Peter squeezed his eyes shut; even though his eyes were covered, it still felt as though Deadpool knew. The night was silent after that, and Peter woke up alone.

Deadpool disappeared for three days, except not entirely. Peter knew the man was actively avoiding him; his apartment was always empty when Peter swung around, and all texts were going unanswered. The weird part was, Deadpool wasn't actually gone. He still occasionally spotted the man while out as Peter Parker, and Deadpool seemed indifferent to all the people around him. It was infuriating, knowing he was so close to Deadpool yet couldn't actually interact with him properly. Despite his desire to push boundaries further as Peter, he figured it would be better to tone it down for a bit and let Deadpool cool off.

And of course, Peter knew himself to be a stubborn, petty man. So after three days of no communication or explanation, Peter started avoiding Deadpool.

## Chapter 7

Suddenly Deadpool was omnipresent. He was there when Peter both entered and left work, which caused some of his coworkers to peer out windows with unease at the sight of a tall, masked, muscular man with crossed arms standing outside the building. He hung around the alleyway of Peter's apartment. He lurked around aisles when Peter finally found the time to go grocery shopping. Through it all, not a single text of his was returned. Eventually, Peter had had enough.

"Can you stop following me?" He snapped, the question directed behind him where Deadpool stood at the edge of the cereal aisle. He was just covered enough to not be noticeable by most, but Peter had never had trouble with sensing the presence of others. Peter turned around. "I'm not stupid, you know. I can tell you're there. And that you've been there, repeatedly."

Deadpool sighed and shuffled into the open. "Thought you wanted to interview me."

Peter rolled his eyes. "Yeah, and Spider-Man already told me you gave a strong no. So what's with the stalking?"

"You think rather highly of yourself, kid."

"It's one of my many talents." Peter crossed his arms. "And I shouldn't call the cops because...?"

"You're in danger."

Peter let out a surprised laugh as his arms fell to his sides; Deadpool's answer had caught him completely off guard in an almost entertaining manner. "Generally that's *why* people call the cops. And from what I can tell, you're the only person who's been practically hunting me down. I told Spider-Man I'd leave you alone about the interview, so could you offer me the same?"

"But you still want the interview."

"You think rather highly of yourself," Peter mimicked.

Deadpool snorted. "Damn, you're annoying. Look, I know you've been changing up your routine. You're going out of your way to be at places at different times and to stay inside more."

Peter eyed him. "Is you telling me this supposed to comfort me? Because it's actually doing the opposite."

"Just listen to me, would you? Even *you* know that you're in danger, which is why it's 2 AM and you're picking out pop-tarts. I'm not one of the baddies—I'm the protection."

"I don't need protection," Peter said coolly. "And I'm at the store for pop-tarts at 2 AM because I was up late working. Not that it's really any of your business. If I needed some sort of bodyguard, I'd call Spider-Man."

He turned to keep walking when Deadpool grabbed his arm. Peter spun around, elbowing him swiftly and kneeing him in the stomach. Deadpool swore and released him. "What the fuck, kid?"

"You're the one who grabbed me!" Peter shouted. "What's wrong with you?"

Deadpool rubbed his shoulder where Peter had jammed his elbow, and sent him a glare. "Don't make a scene about it. I'll explain more elsewhere."

“Because that sounds completely safe and not at all suspicious to lure me somewhere with fewer witnesses.”

“Just follow me.”

It went against Peter’s every logical fiber in his body to follow Deadpool, but even despite his anger he had missed the man. Ultimately, he begrudgingly fell into step behind Deadpool all the way back to his apartment. It was a quiet walk, save for the shuffle of feet and the sounds of scuff marks against concrete. By the time they reached the apartment, small raindrops littered the ground. Silently, Deadpool held out an arm and covered Peter’s head to the best of his ability. Peter tilted his head up curiously at him, though it was in vain; Deadpool maintained his forward stare without even the slightest falter.

“So,” Peter said when they were situated inside the warm, dry apartment. They were the first words shared since the supermarket. He sat awkwardly on the couch, feeling incredibly out of place despite having sat in the exact spot dozens of times prior. “This is either where you explain your weird-ass behavior, or you murder me and hide my gullible body. Or both, I suppose, if you’re feeling particularly motivated.”

“You do realize I’m not the only one following you, right?”

Peter blinked. “Uh, but you are?”

“Dozens of people want you dead,” Deadpool stressed. “Maybe more. A lot of them are in prison, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t watching.”

“I think you have the wrong idea,” Peter said, shaking his head. His Spidey senses would have alerted him if he were in any actual danger. “I’m not in any danger, except maybe of ruining my sleep schedule at this rate.”

Deadpool looked as though he was getting more frustrated with each word. “You’re *not* getting it. Just because you’re buddy-buddy with Spider-Man doesn’t mean you’re invincible. You know there are three hits out on you right now?”

On Peter Parker? Talk about a waste of money and time.

Peter waved him off. “I think you have the wrong person. As a photographer, yeah, I piss some people off, but not enough for someone to put a hit out on me.”

“Maybe not, but people know you have connections to Spider-Man. And that’s worth something.”

Peter frowned and squeezed the edge of the couch. Other than having snapped pictures of Spider-Man, he made no point to publicly advertise their interaction. If anything, he tried to minimize it. “There have to be other people who know him better and who are worth more. Like actual superheroes.”

“Maybe,” Deadpool admitted. He didn’t sound convinced. “But that ain’t stopping ‘em. So listen, kid. I’ll be your ears and eyes. As long as I’m following you, no one else is.”

“I don’t particularly want to be followed at all,” Peter said, tone dull. “I can just ask Spider—”

“No,” Deadpool interrupted. “He hasn’t been anywhere near you the past few days. You call that good protection?”

“Y’know, that’s my friend you’re insulting.” Or self. Whatever. It still stung a bit, especially

considering how Deadpool had been adamantly ignoring him. It was insult to injury, essentially. He couldn't exactly pretend to watch his civilian self when Deadpool ran from Spider-Man and stuck like glue to Peter.

Deadpool was quiet for a moment. "He's my friend, too."

Peter was surprised out of words briefly. He brought his legs up to his chest and wrapped his arms around his knees. He knew he had no reason to be caught off guard considering how much time they had spent together, but the young, insecure part of him had started doubting such a concept as soon as Deadpool began his vanishing act. Peter had figured that after actually getting to know him, Deadpool saw the flaws and ugliness behind the pedestal he had once shoved Peter onto. The wounds were still fresh, even though Peter knew all too well that putting others on pedestals never ended positively.

It had felt like he truly had someone on his side, someone who accepted him in his moments of failure and weakness. With all the anger that had clouded his thoughts, he hadn't stopped to think about how dejected and deflated he felt about seemingly losing Deadpool as a friend. He was well trained enough to not start crying, but a minute part of him desired the release.

"He...he talks about me, right?"

Peter blinked and looked up. Deadpool looked miserable, expression in a half wince, half grimace. Apparently, Peter's surprised look was enough to draw out Deadpool's own insecurities in regards to friendship. "What?"

"He talks about me," Deadpool said, though it sounded more like a question. "When you're with him, he talks about me? And him? We have some pretty crazy adventures..."

"Y-yeah," Peter stuttered. "He talks about you... a lot."

"All good stuff, I hope," Deadpool joked weakly.

Peter fiddled with his glasses, trying to not think about how smudged they would end up later. "Yeah."

There was silence.

"Look, I should go," Peter eventually said. He missed Deadpool's company, but it was also a weekday and nearing 2:30 AM.

Deadpool exhaled loudly. "Fine, but I'm walking you back."

Peter shrugged. "Suit yourself."

He let Deadpool walk with him to the front of the complex, but not to his door; he still had secrets he needed to maintain.

"I'm safe," Peter said. "You can stop stalking me now, thanks."

Deadpool didn't stop, but Peter did get a text from him the next day.

**Spideyyyyy**

**hie**

**hi\*j**

**FUCK hi\***

Peter raised an eyebrow at the flurry of texts; if he didn't know Deadpool as well as he did, he would have assumed the man to be drunk. Still, he felt a familiar and welcomed burn in his chest at the contact. It hurt in the best way possible.

**Hey Wade. What's up?**

He was at work, and really should have had his phone off, but the allure of talking to Deadpool was overpowering. It felt as though his previously tilted world had balanced again—that everything was in its proper place. There was a pang of yearning that accompanied the texts, one that brought images of fingers curling around skin and the hard press of contact.

**i need a player 2!! come be my better half**

**pls i have food**

**and cocaine**

**jk on the cocaine**

**unless u want sum? i kno a guy**

**the guy is me**

Tempting—excluding the cocaine—but too risky for his financial stability. His stomach was certainly interested, though; it growled irritably. Peter made a mental note to subtly request pizza later.

**Sorry, but I'm working**

And he would be until 7. He glanced at the clock; it was barely noon. He sighed.

**that works too :p i'll join you**

**where u at bby boy?**

Peter frowned. He let his finger tap against his phone while he thought. A visit *would* be nice, but there was no realistic way for it to happen without his coworkers panicking—they had calmed down but were still paranoid, and with good reason, from Deadpool's previous stalking—and his identity being released.

**Not that kind of work. The kind that actually pays bills**

Peter forced himself to put his phone back down on his desk and turn to his work. Deadpool was persistent, though.

**o shit! u have an actual job?**

**daddys so proud of u**

**u a stripper?**



**nudes plz?**

**i'll settle for just a nip**

**spidey i have needs :-)**

**right ur probably working lol come over whenever ur done pole dancing ;-)**

Sometimes Peter wondered how such an attitude was actually attractive to him, but he figured it was better not to question it.

As soon as work was over, Peter texted Deadpool.

**ETA 10 minutes. Make sure pizza's there**

Maybe he could have been more subtle. He hurried into costume and swung over. The window was open a crack, and Peter felt a surge of affection flush through him. Deadpool was lounging on the couch, pizza slice in hand. He gave Peter a two finger salute.

Peter shrugged his mask up, grabbed a slice of pizza, and collapsed onto the couch. "Oh man, I'm starving. Thanks for grabbing dinner, Wade."

"I expect restitution, of course," Deadpool said. He watched Peter lazily, eyes lingering on each point of interest. He spent an absurd amount of time staring at Peter's crotch.

"Course," Peter said, already on the crust. He finished quickly and turned to face Deadpool. "You got a pole?"

Deadpool sputtered while Peter laughed and reached for another slice. It was washed down with a swig of water.

"I'll pay you back though," Peter said after the two finished composing themselves. "I just got paid last Friday."

"Y'know, it's weird thinking of you having a real job. The non-shooty type."

Peter raised an eyebrow at him. "I never use guns, though."

Deadpool waved him off. "Yeah, yeah, but you *get* shot at."

"That I do," Peter said with a sigh. Even with his Spidey sense and quick reflexes, he still felt a jolt of panic at every gunshot he encountered. "It's definitely easier to not have to deal with that at work. Though it does make the job more interesting."

"Stuffy manager at a Fortune 500 tech industry company."

"Sorry?"

"Your job," Deadpool said with a crooked smile. "Did I guess it right? Do I get a lolly?"

Peter returned the grin. "Way, way off. I'll give you two more guesses, though, but after that, you're eternally banished to the realm of uncertainty."

"Nerd."

"Dork."

“Paper boy? You got them thighs for sure.”

“Because being a literal superhero isn’t a good enough explanation for having muscles?” Peter leaned back on the couch. Somehow, they had already gone through almost half the pizza; he reached for another slice. “One guess left, by the way.”

Deadpool groaned and flopped onto Peter's lap. He looked up at Peter with a piercing gaze, eyes bright and hard. Peter suppressed a shiver. “Spidey, just tell me. There are like a bajillion jobs in the world. It can be our little secret.”

Peter shifted to get more comfortable. He rested a hand on Deadpool’s forehead. “Sorry. It kind of defeats the purpose of a secret identity.”

“Can we have a different little secret?”

“Sure, Wade.”

“Okay. So, what’s your full name and address?”

Peter laughed. “Cute.”

“I know, thanks,” Deadpool said with a wide grin. “You’re not bad yourself, doll. You model?”

Peter made a buzzing noise. “Aww, three strikes and you’re out.”

Deadpool pouted. “Consolation prize?”

“Jeez,” Peter said with a sigh. “You and your need for compensation today.”

“I’m high maintenance. If you can't handle me at my best, you don't deserve me at my worst. Wait.”

“Noted,” Peter said. “Did you want to get some patrolling done? The night is still young.”

“Hell yeah! Will you carry me on your back?”

Peter huffed. “Only because I kind of owe you. Get up, you big lump.”

Deadpool sprung to his feet and shifted his mask back into place. Peter turned to this side and let Deadpool climb on his back. The man clung to him eagerly. The night was somewhat quiet while the two swung through the air, save for Deadpool’s ‘whoos’ of joy and bursts of heated raps. In the midst of connecting a web to a streetlamp, Peter felt a sharp pain hit his arm and the two tumbled clumsily onto the ground.

Peter groaned, pushing Deadpool off his back. “Aww, heck.”

Deadpool snorted. “Heck, really? This is rated T, it’s okay for you to say hell. And what was with that miss? My dead grandma coulda made that catch.”

Peter looked down at the arm he had instinctively begun cradling. He squeezed it gently and hissed at the pain that erupted. “I got shot....”

All traces of humor left Deadpool instantaneously. He jumped up and grabbed Peter by his shoulders. Peter suppressed a cry at the harsh contact. Deadpool’s hands were dangerously close to where the bullet had hit. “Oh shit!”

"I'm fine, fine. It's fine," Peter babbled. He watched a stream of ruddy blood drip to the ground. The sight never stopped being unsettling, but at the very least he was somewhat used to it—enough to not pass out. "It looks worse than it is...."

Gun shots usually did, but Deadpool still shook his head.

"No, I need to patch you up. We're heading back."

"I'm fine," Peter repeated and was promptly cut off by another bullet slicing into his ankle. He bit his lip and collapsed back onto the ground, head curled in toward his chest. He slammed a fist on the concrete. "Argh, fuddruckers!"

"Damn it," Deadpool whispered. He picked Peter up and started sprinting in the direction they had come. The wind whistled against them in the dark night. "I'm taking you the fuck back."

"Wade," Peter said. His head pounded with each step Deadpool took. "No, we need to finish patrol—you gotta catch that guy. Wade!"

"Sorry baby boy, but if you think I'm leaving you and going on a wild goose chase, then you're a fucking idiot. Just hold on."

With his good hand, Peter clutched Deadpool's shoulder. The man was warm—almost as warm as the blood pooling up and spilling from Peter's wounds. He shuddered briefly, beginning to feel lightheaded. He hid his face in Deadpool's chest and mumbled something unintelligible. He felt Deadpool's heart beat thunderously against his cheek.

"What's that, baby boy?" Deadpool said. He sounded breathless. "You gotta speak up."

"Tired," Peter slurred and shut his eyes.

He woke up on Deadpool's bed. He squinted around in the dark, attempting to regain focus on a single object. Trying to sit up got him a gentle hand on the chest, shoving him back down.

"Don't get up." Deadpool's voice was quiet, but not quite a whisper. "Do you need something?"

"Yeah," Peter mumbled. "Gotta pee."

Deadpool sighed. "Okay, fine."

Deadpool helped him hobble to the bathroom and even closed the door for him. After relieving himself, Peter was dragged back to the bed.

"My arm hurts," Peter said. His sight was blurry again. "And my leg... what time is it?"

"Half past ten, baby boy."

"Wade. Stay here." Peter tugged on Deadpool's arm and patted the blanket. "Stay."

"Always," Deadpool said in agreement, taking the seat next to him.

Peter sighed and closed his eyes; the simple feat of lying back down soothed his aching muscles. "Don't just sit—lie down. 'S your bed."

Deadpool hesitated. Peter searched blindly for his arm and pulled on it again. "Spidey..."

"Please," Peter said, trying to prevent his voice from turning into a whine. "We've slept in the

same bed before. I need you.”

Deadpool shuddered but complied. Peter immediately curled his fingers around Deadpool’s nearest bicep. The action helped Peter feel more grounded, but his head still stung along with his left arm and right leg.

“What happened? Why does it hurt.”

“You got shot, twice,” Deadpool murmured. “You lost a lotta blood. Might be dizzy.”

Peter attempted to nod but forwent it halfway through in favor of lying still. “Yeah... I am.”

“Just sleep,” Deadpool urged. “You’ll feel better when you wake up.”

“You’ll be here?”

“Yeah.”

“Promise?”

Deadpool’s voice sounded strangled: “I promise. Now *sleep*.”

He slept.

The next time Peter awoke it was morning. There were lingering remnants of pain that flared up before vanishing as quickly as they arose. His mind flooded with inconsistent memories of the night prior. He remembered being shot at—and probably wouldn’t forget at any point soon—but the timeline past that was hazy. When he glanced down at his arm, he noticed a small stitch on the wound; his leg probably had the same. The apartment was a dark haven thanks to its closed blinds and black curtains, but a nearby clock told Peter it was nearing six. Fortunately, that meant Peter still had an hour and a half before he was supposed to be at work.

“Wade?”

“In here, sweet cheeks.”

“You left,” Peter complained as he trudged into the living room. He stopped abruptly; Deadpool was polishing one katana while the other shone against his suit. “What’s going on?”

“Nothin’ much, honey bun.”

Peter eyed him warily. From his experiences, the excessive amount of pet names indicated suspicious behavior on Deadpool’s behalf. “Why are you cleaning your katanas?”

Deadpool paused and sighed. “Spidey, you got shot.”

“I’m aware,” Peter said tersely. “I was there.”

“It’s just business, baby boy,” Deadpool said carefully. He edged toward the door as he spoke.

“You want to shoot him.” Peter’s tone was flat.

Deadpool shrugged and sheathed his second katana, patting it as one would a baby. “I was thinking katanas, but tomato tomatoh. It’s not like he’ll have a preference. Or be alive long enough to tell me it.”

"I'm not above webbing you immobilized," Peter warned. He had left his gloves in the bedroom, but he was fast—faster than Deadpool.

Deadpool chuckled. "Come on, Spidey. We both know that's not gonna stop me. Just, lie back down. The wounds probably still hurt. I'll be back in a jiffy! And with some jiffy, if you want a snack."

"Wade, don't do this," Peter pleaded. "It's not worth it."

"Even you wanted to go after him last night," Deadpool said coolly.

"Yeah, to apprehend him, not kill him!"

"Unalive," Deadpool provided. Not helpful.

"I don't care what you call it, it's not right. He doesn't deserve to die."

"He shot at you," Deadpool said. "*Twice*. And I can tell you from your arm wound that he was aiming for something a little closer to your chest. Shoot to kill, baby, AC/DC 1980."

"You don't have to explain the reference to me," Peter said. "And it's 'Shoot to thrill'."

"Gotta explain it to the youngins reading. And you should be angrier," Deadpool suggested. "Someone just tried to unalive you. I mean, I can be angry enough for the both of us, but it's all cathartic to just unleash your rage. Really gets the blood pumping. Great time for some angry sex, too."

"I am angry," Peter said, and he was, but more with Deadpool than the shooter. "But it's not the first time, and it certainly won't be the last. You can't just go through your life always enacting revenge on people who have wronged you, no matter the extent. You don't have to forget that it happened, but you can forgive."

It was rather hypocritical advice on his end, with himself drowning in fields of guilt growing from other guilt like weeds. There were things he knew he could never forgive himself for, regardless of his strength.

"It's not revenge," Deadpool muttered, despite the fact that both men clearly knew it was. "I'm ridding the streets of scum. It's service for the city, really."

"He doesn't deserve that," Peter said again. "Jail time and fines, yeah, but not death."

"Not *everyone* can be rehabilitated," Deadpool said through his teeth. "There are some monsters out there who have nothing redeeming about them. The repeat offenders—the ones who just slip through the hands of incompetent officers and judges."

"That's not true," Peter said softly. "And that's not for you to decide."

"Yeah? Says who?"

"Says the law!"

Deadpool stood up and stalked over to Peter. He shoved him, causing Peter to trip over his feet and bump his back against the wall. Peter looked at him with a hurt expression. Deadpool ignored it. "The law ain't always right, kid. Not like they're listening to it, anyway."

"What about you?" Peter shot back. He felt prickles of anger climb up his back, ones that were

perhaps long awaiting release. Things had been good—really good, but he knew better than to expect it to last. There was always one dip in the road that left the two feeling like strangers again. Peter didn't think he could handle that happening again so soon after Deadpool avoiding him, but he couldn't diminish the mixture of fury and disappointment that brewed inside him. "You were a 'repeat offender'. You always escaped law enforcement—and, and now look. It's been *weeks*, Wade, and you haven't done anything bad."

Deadpool's shoulders dropped. "Not all of us have a Spider-Man in our life to tell us right from wrong."

Peter shook his head. The anger was receding somewhat, but it still was palpable in his expression and tone. He couldn't be placated so easily; who knew what Deadpool would have done had Peter woken up a few minutes later. "Wade, I can't control you. I can lecture you, yeah, but in the end, you're the one who decides how you're going to act. If you really wanted to kill someone, you would have done so regardless of my opinion. Please, for both our sakes, don't put so much faith in me and so little in yourself. That's not fair."

Deadpool shook his head. "You keep me on my toes, Spidey, and even then it's tough. Gotta let go sometimes, and all I've got left to off is myself."

Peter's blood went cold. He set a hand on the wall behind him for support. "W-what?"

Deadpool offered a bitter smile and tugged his mask down. "Didn't think you'd stop that, did you? I'm not a fucking project for you. No happily ever for this merc."

Peter felt as though he had been punched in the gut. He wanted to feel responsible, knowing he could have saved Deadpool from death, but also knew that the man had been making it so difficult to find him. Had he been avoiding Peter just so he could kill himself? Peter slid down the wall and curled his arms around his knees. He felt ill.

"Aww, what's wrong? The itsy bitsy spider fall down the rabbit hole?"

"Stop," Peter said weakly. "This isn't you."

"Oh, but it is, baby boy," Deadpool said, and his laugh was chilling. "It's me, all right. A big fucking joke and a mercenary to boot. You want some fries with that?"

Everything was off-kilter; it was all wrong, and Peter didn't know how to fix it. And Peter *needed* to fix it.

"Stop pushing me away," Peter eventually said. "I know what you're doing, and it's not working. I'm not leaving."

Deadpool shrugged. "You don't have to. You can wait here."

"Wade," Peter said. He rose to his feet and took a few steps toward Deadpool. Deadpool took a step backward. "Stay with me. I'll—I'll call in sick from work. Just please, stay here."

Deadpool stood very still for what seemed like days. Finally, he slipped past Peter and sat down on his couch. "Go into work, Spider-Man."

Peter nibbled on his lip. He was struck between not believing Deadpool—which was a horrible feeling—and not wanting to be fired. "I can stay."

"Just go. I won't unalive anyone. You've got my fuckin' word."

“Do you... need me here?” Peter rubbed his shoulder. Though the tension was dwindling, he still felt tied to the room.

“I don’t *need* anyone,” Deadpool said. “I came hardwired with two friends.”

“They’re not very friendly,” Peter said. “I’ll just—I’ll be back right after work.”

“Don’t bother,” Deadpool said quietly while Peter let himself out. He pretended not to hear.

## Chapter 8

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Everyone at work seemed to sense that Peter was bothered. His coworkers all granted him copious amounts of space, and the only person to talk to him was a new intern who had yet to fully join the ranks. Within moments of dealing with Peter's dull and stilted sentences, the intern wised up and left. Even J.J. Jameson went easy on him with only one shouted lecture. Normally, Peter would have felt anger or embarrassment or anything, but he just felt numb. Even in his rage, Jameson's words held nowhere near the weight that Deadpool's had.

As he retyped a sentence for the fourth time, his mind wandered back to Deadpool. He wondered how many times the man had killed himself while finding every excuse in the book to evade Peter. He wondered how Deadpool had done it, where he had done it, and who—if anyone—had found him. He wondered what kind of hero he was when he couldn't even stop his own friend from committing suicide.

It was a long and lonely shift. He clocked out thirty minutes later than normal and considered just going home. Last he checked, he was a week behind on his online classes—probably more, now—and the responsible decision would be to go and complete his assignments with little thought given to Deadpool or the past twenty-four hours. Thanks to his healing abilities, his wounds were almost completely gone, though he still felt a weariness deep within his bones.

Peter ended up just outside a café, peering in and considering his options for coffee. It was already past 7 PM, but it felt like the right thing to do. Maybe he was just stalling, though. After a few minutes of staring blankly at the menu and having people awkwardly glance at him, he headed inside.

He had just finished ordering an Americano and a caramel macchiato when a voice cried out:

"Is that... Peter! Oh my gosh!"

Peter glanced up from his receipt to see Mary Jane hurrying over to him, wearing a fond smile and her familiar black flats. She was carrying what he knew had to be a decaf green tea; dozens of coffee dates would imprint that sort of knowledge in his brain.

"It must—oh, oh dear, Peter."

Peter blinked. "Uh, hi MJ."

Her bright smile fell into a concerned frown. "You... look so bad."

Peter rolled his eyes. "Thanks. That's exactly what a guy likes to hear."

With a huff, Mary Jane swatted his shoulder. "Oh, get over yourself. Have you been sleeping? Eating?"

"You sound like Aunt May," Peter said, though he cracked a smile.

"There's that smile I know and love!" She took a seat at the table he was leaning against. "So, tiger, how have you been? I don't think I've seen you since September."



Peter shrugged. "You know how work is."

Her eyes sparkled. "And your extracurricular."

"Right," Peter said with a forced laugh; that facet of his life suddenly felt uncomfortable to talk about. "How are you?"

"I've been fine," she said. She sipped her tea and thought for a moment. "But I miss you. Do you not go outside anymore, or have I just never been fortunate enough to bump into you?"

"Uh, both?" His social life was definitely to be desired. As of recently, Deadpool had been the only consistent interaction he had outside of work, though as of tonight that was subject to change. He was half sure Deadpool had changed all the locks and bolted his window shut. A bit of an overreaction, perhaps, but Deadpool never half-assed anything. "I miss you too, MJ. I'll... try not to be as much of a recluse."

She giggled. "Oh, how I've missed those puns. Don't be a stranger, okay? You still have my number, right?"

Peter fished his phone from his pocket. "It ends in 4413, right?"

Mary Jane nodded. "That's the one."

"I'll call you," Peter assured. "We can have lunch next week and swap gossip."

She smiled, glancing down at her phone and standing up. She put a warm hand on Peter's shoulder and gave his cheek a chaste kiss. "We better."

"Peter!"

Peter startled out of Mary Jane's hold. He glanced to the pickup area where two steaming drinks were waiting for him. He quickly grabbed the coffees and fiddled lids onto them. He turned back to Mary Jane, who was looking at his beverages with heightened curiosity.

"Well, uh, I should—"

"Why do you have two drinks?"

"U-uh," Peter stuttered. "I'm really thirsty, and I've got this essay I need to stay up to write... and they say caffeine is good for you, and uh."

Mary Jane's lips quirked into a smile. "Had you stopped at the first excuse I *might* have believed you."

She sat back down and tugged on Peter's sleeve for him to follow. He sighed, but sat across from her and sent her a weary look.

"So," she said, resting her head on her folded hands. She smiled brightly at him. "Who is she?"

"Wait, what?"

Mary Jane gestured with her head toward his macchiato. "Your girlfriend! I can't believe you didn't tell me sooner. Visits or no visits, this is the kind of gossip I expect to hear immediately. So, what's her name?"

Wade wasn't a girl's name in some distant, arcane country, was it?

Peter shook his head. “No, I...”

“Ooooh, I get it. Not yet, huh? Well, I believe in you, tiger. Can I still know her name?”

Peter rubbed his neck.

“Fine,” Mary Jane said with a dramatic sigh. “And let me guess, I can’t tell Aunt May?”

Peter frowned. “You and Aunt May talk?”

“Of course! I love our weekly brunches. Aunt May makes a mean mimosa.”

Peter stared blankly at her. “You’re joking.”

She cracked a smile. “I am. But we do stay in touch—more than you and I do, which is sad.”

Peter sighed. “You probably stay more in touch with Aunt May than she and I do, so. But uh, yeah. Nothing is official, so I don’t really want to say everything.”

Not to mention there was no girl, and not only was it not official, but Peter had just barely talked Deadpool out of literally murdering a man. So there was that.

“Got it,” she said with a nod. Her expression softened. “I’m happy for you, though, Peter. I worry about you.”

“Yes, Aunt May.”

She rolled her eyes and smirked. “Funny.”

“I uh, I should be heading out, though.”

Mary Jane nodded. “I don’t want to make you keep her waiting.”

Him.

“Yeah. Uh, see you later?”

“You better call, Peter Benjamin Parker, or I will drag you from your apartment,” she said. And Peter didn’t doubt her for one second. “Maybe you could bring your girl—almost girlfriend.”

Almost boyfriend.

“Yeah, maybe,” Peter said, avoiding eye contact. “I’ll ask.”

He would tell her soon. He just couldn’t do it like this.

She smiled. “See ya, tiger.”

“See you, MJ.”

Peter sighed as he walked home. He had missed Mary Jane, and he felt even worse lying to her. He didn’t fully understand his own emotions, though, and he didn’t want to risk being wrong. Especially not about a man. He knew that MJ—being the incredible friend and person she was—would be supportive of him no matter what, but he just wasn’t ready to let that information out unless he had to. The walk home was short and he was left just as conflicted as when he had left the café. He let the two drinks cool slightly on his kitchen table while he switched into his

costume. Had he thought ahead, he would have taken a drink holder and simply swung toward Deadpool's apartment. His mind was all over the place, though, so he was grateful for the fact that he had at the very least remembered to scribble out his name on the side of the drinks with a sharpie. A caramel macchiato was not on the list of ways he wanted to reveal his secret identity.

Unfortunately, walking meant he couldn't slip through the window; he had to go to the front door. Peter sighed again as he clambered upstairs—trust his luck for the elevator to be broken on today of all days—and toward Deadpool's apartment. Going through the front door meant there was a possibility Deadpool would just close the door on him. After a few minutes of internally battling with himself, Peter sucked up his anxieties and knocked on the door.

There was no answer, even after he waited a solid two minutes.

He stared at the door; he hadn't planned for that. He had planned how he would respond based on whether or not Deadpool let him inside, but he hadn't stopped to think that maybe the man wasn't even home. A sinking feeling coiled throughout him and set up shop in his stomach; was Deadpool out killing someone? He hurried back down the ten flights of stairs—thank the lord he was in shape—and stared up at the building. He downed the rest of his Americano, tossed the cup in the trash, and started climbing. It was difficult one-handed but not impossible. Despite his desire to drink it for energy, he kept the second coffee drink pristine.

After reaching the floor, he glanced into the window. Though it was evening, a light thankfully shone through and illuminated the room. Deadpool lay on the couch, arm thrown low enough it was touching the ground and face buried in a pillow. Peter let out a sigh of relief. He climbed carefully into the apartment, trying his best not to wake Deadpool. Peter placed the coffee on the table in front of the couch and watched him.

The man must have been tired to have fallen asleep as early as 8. Peter wondered if he had gotten any sleep the night before and felt guilt creeping in. Every time he had woken, Deadpool had just been sitting and watching him out of concern. Maybe that explained Deadpool's irate mood, or maybe Peter had pushed too hard to change who Deadpool was. As much as Peter enjoyed giving people the benefit of the doubt, he didn't think he and Deadpool could come back to whatever it was they had was Deadpool to kill again. A part of him didn't want to tell Deadpool that, though, but instead let him act on his own accord. The point was for Deadpool to stop killing because he wanted to, not because someone pressured him to.

Peter positioned himself on the arm of the couch closest to Deadpool's face. He turned to glance at the sleeping mercenary. His body was taut, exuding stress and wariness. Letting his heart take over, Peter rested his hand on Deadpool's shoulder and stroked gently.

Deadpool was awake immediately, seeming bent on squeezing the life out of Peter's hand.

Peter winced, more from the action itself than the actual pressure of Deadpool's grip. "Wade, it's just me."

"Spidey?" Deadpool slowly released him. "The fuck are you doing touching me while I'm asleep? You ever hear of a little thing called consent?"

Peter rolled his eyes. "Because the thought of me touching you horrifies you so much, huh?"

Deadpool stretched his back, twisting into angles akin to the ones Peter had only observed cats in. It was impressive, and Peter found himself wanting to trace the lines of Deadpool's muscles, to see the full effect of the way his body could contort.

“I just don’t want to *hurt you*, baby boy. Sometimes daddy doesn’t know his own strength, especially when you creep up on him like a baddie. You’re lucky it was just my hand and not my gun.”

Peter’s expression softened. “I’m not afraid of you, Wade.”

Deadpool was silent for a moment. “Is that a caramel macchiato?”

“O-oh, yeah, here.” Peter handed the coffee over. “I know it’s kind of late, and it might be cold by now...”

Deadpool’s lips quirked up. “Didn’t know you knew I liked them.”

“Lucky guess,” Peter said with a shrug, though it was anything but. “Look... I...I’m sorry about earlier.”

Deadpool’s eyebrows jumped up his face. He didn’t have any actual hair on them, but Peter could tell where they were from the indents in his skin. It was fascinating how expressive they still were. “Hold the phone. *You’re* sorry?”

“Uh, yes?”

“Unbelievable,” Deadpool said. “I was about to unalive a baddie and you apologize?”

Peter fidgeted. “I shouldn’t have lectured you. We both know you have agency—and I don’t want it to seem like I’m trying to take that away.”

Deadpool sipped his coffee and let out a long sigh. “Damn, that’s good.” He patted the couch next to him. “Sit down, baby boy. And stop trying to apologize, would you?”

Peter sat down and shifted to face Deadpool. “It’s okay that I’m here, right?”

Deadpool leaned back against the couch cushion and closed his eyes. “Spidey, it’s more than okay that you’re here. I was worried I scared ya off for good this time. Don’t know why you keep coming back after I treat you like shit.”

Sometimes Peter didn’t really know either, but it was usually when he was trying to hide his feelings. He had observed the changes in Deadpool first hand, though. Peter knew the man was capable of joining the side of the law if he so desired. Peter gave a halfhearted shrug in response.

Deadpool glanced over to him. “I appreciate it though. Nice to know someone out there is as crazy as I am. So uh, sorry for. All that.”

“Yeah,” Peter said. He moved his hand to rest on top of Deadpool’s. Time to make MJ proud. “It’s okay.”

Deadpool finished his drink, burped, and tossed the cup to parts unknown. It probably wouldn’t turn up until months later, wedged between a grimy sock and a rusted pan.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have gotten you coffee so late,” Peter mumbled. “Since you were trying to sleep.”

“Nah, caffeine doesn’t affect me,” Deadpool said. “And that was more sugar than caffeine anyway. I accept it as payment for the pizza, though, so Spidey is a free elf again.”

Peter smiled. “I was always sorted into Ravenclaw or Gryffindor—it seemed to change every time.

Never got a final answer.”

“That makes sense,” Deadpool said, “being a superhero nerd and all that. I was a mix of Hufflepuff and Slytherin!”

“It’s depressing how fitting that is,” Peter said. “Wanna marathon Harry Potter?”

“It’s like you’re speaking French,” Deadpool cooed. “In a good way—cause it’s the language of love, not cause I don’t understand you.”

“I do have work in the morning,” Peter warned. “So either I’m falling asleep after the second movie, or I’m staying up all night like an idiot.”

Deadpool thought about it. “On a scale of overdosing on caffeine to coma patient, how tired are you right now?”

Peter yawned. “Like a four?”

“Movies it is!” Deadpool shot up from the couch and started the first film. “Wait. Have you eaten, baby boy?”

“Oh, uh. Not yet.” Peter shrugged. “But it’s whatever.”

Deadpool put a hand on his chest, offended. “As if I would ever let a guest starve! BRB; leftover pizza is the shit.”

He flounced to the kitchen and brought back the half of the pizza the two hadn’t eaten.

“Bon appetite, mon spideur.”

Peter laughed. “You can’t just add an accent to make it into French.”

“Uh, I didn’t realize you were elected Queen of France.”

“Maybe read a newspaper sometime,” Peter said, chewing on a slice.

“Ugh, boring. I bet you read books, too.”

“Sometimes,” Peter admitted.

Deadpool made a gagging noise and resumed the movie. Partway through the first film and after all the pizza was finished, Deadpool hesitantly laid his hand on Peter’s. Peter smiled.

Right around the time Hermione was petrified, Peter started yawning and couldn’t stop.

“Ooookay,” Deadpool said and paused the film. “It’s bedtime for you, mister.”

Peter yawned again. “You tired?”

“Enough,” Deadpool said. “Up you go.”

Peter rolled his eyes. “I’m tired, not six. I can get to bed myself.”

Deadpool wiped away a nonexistent tear. “They grow up so fast.”

Peter dragged himself to the bathroom—he had been smart enough to buy a cheap toothbrush a few nights prior—and readied himself for bed. The bedroom was familiar, something which Peter

found comforting. He burrowed himself under the blanket and watched the doorway. After a few minutes, Deadpool poked his head in.

“You sure you don’t want me taking the couch?” Deadpool lingered by the door.

Peter rolled his eyes. “Get over here. If you don’t mind me in your bed.”

“I may be crazy, but I’m not crazy enough to kick Spider-Man out of my bed.”

“Then come on,” Peter said softly.

Deadpool shut off the lights before stripping down to his boxers. Just enough moonlight slipped through the curtains for Peter to admire the man before him.

“Not me this time, huh?”

Peter caught the end of a grin. “Nah, had to go with an original.”

“They are pretty great,” Peter said. Deadpool’s boxers were littered with small roosters.

Deadpool shoved Peter’s shoulder as he got in. “Move over, toots. I gotta make room for my huge cock.”

“Okay, that one was bad. And that’s coming from me.”

“Wasn’t talking about the boxers,” Deadpool said. He followed it up with a wink. “Wanna tell ghost stories?”

“Wade, it’s like midnight.”

“Well, *duh*, that’s the perfect time to tell scary stories. When it’s all dark and spooky and no one can come save you!”

“And I have work in the morning.”

Deadpool was quiet for a moment. “I mean, if you do die then you don’t have to go into work tomorrow.”

Peter laughed and shifted on his side to face Deadpool. He rested his head on his hands. “You don’t know the number of times that exact thought has crossed my mind. I have to make a living somehow, though.”

“I can be your sugar daddy!”

“I’m good,” Peter said with a snort. “If I wanted to sell my body, I’d look for someone richer—like Tony Stark.”

Deadpool pouted. “I can’t even believe you just dissed me like that. I thought we had something, Spidey. And now I find out you’re cheating on me with metal man?”

“Y’know he hates when you call him that.”

“Yeah,” Deadpool said. “That’s why I do it. He’s taken by America Man, though.”

Peter raised an eyebrow. “You think Captain America is gay?”

“I *hope* Captain America is gay,” Deadpool said. “Plus he could be bisexual! Don’t start your bi-erasure here.”

“I’m not,” Peter said with a smile. He certainly was not. “Go to sleep, Wade. We can discuss the Avengers’ sexualities more tomorrow.”

“I’m holding you to that,” Deadpool said. “And you better be ready to discuss the difference between Bruce and the Hulk. In detail.”

Peter yawned. “I will, I will. Goodnight, Wade.”

“Goodnight, Spidey.”

Peter shuffled a bit to find a more comfortable way to lie. He peered up at Deadpool, who was sprawled out, legs crossed and an arm thrown over his chest. He looked peaceful; it was nice. It just so happened Peter was also exhausted enough to not dwell on potential consequences of wiggling closer to Deadpool, and so he did exactly that. Deadpool stiffened as he had last time but relaxed much quicker. He also didn’t speak.

Peter rested one of his arms on Deadpool’s chest. Deadpool took a sharp breath inwards.

“You’re not going to avoid me for three days again, are you?” Peter asked quietly. Without his gloves, he could feel the uneven skin and harsh ridges of Deadpool’s chest. And it was warm, so incredibly warm.

Deadpool sighed. “No, baby boy.”

Satisfied with the answer, Peter let his mind drift off. A few minutes later, he wasn’t entirely asleep but was definitely close.

“Spidey?”

So much for sleep. “Yeah?”

“You awake?”

Peter rolled his eyes. “No, I just responded to you in my sleep.”

“Oh.”

“Yes, Wade, I’m awake.”

“Oh, good.”

There was another moment of silence.

“What is it?”

“Huh?”

“You asked if I was awake. What did you want to tell me?” Sometimes talking with Deadpool was like pulling teeth. Lots of teeth.

“Oh, right. I didn’t have anything to tell you. I just wanted to hear your lovely voice.”

Peter groaned. “Seriously? Work in the morning, remember?”

“But I misssssed you. And your voice. Just give me a mixtape with you saying things and I’ll be lulled to sleep like a baby.”

“...”

“Okay, well, that sounded less creepy in my head,” Deadpool said.

“Sure it did,” Peter said dryly. “Also no one uses mixtapes anymore.”

“Well, they should! That shit was so romantic,” Deadpool said in a wistful tone.

“Get with the times, gramps.”

Deadpool gasped. “Just for that comment, I’m revoking your chest privileges.”

He pushed Peter’s arm off his chest, and then quickly pulled it back.

“I missed you, baby boy,” Deadpool said with a sigh.

Peter smiled and pressed his nose against the side of Deadpool’s chest. It felt like home. “Missed you too, Wade.”

Deadpool hesitantly wrapped his arm around Peter and squeezed. Peter let out a shaky breath and found his courage at 1:15 AM. He rose slightly from the bed and shifted until he was sitting on Deadpool’s lap. Neither man said a word. Deadpool’s eyes were wide and slightly uneasy. Peter placed his hands against Deadpool’s thumping chest and leaned down to kiss him. Inhaling sharply, Deadpool immediately grabbed Peter’s face and dragged him closer. Peter let out a surprised chuckle and let his lips move slowly across Deadpool’s. For a few minutes, the only noises were of breathy gasps and lips touching.

Deadpool pulled back and let his hands fall to Peter’s hips. “Holy fucking shit, Spider-Man is gay.”

Peter cleared his throat. “Now who’s erasing bisexuals?”

“You just... *you* kissed *me*.”

“Yeah,” Peter said, still a bit breathless. He couldn’t stop the smile that was forming. “I did.”

Deadpool looked around the room. “There aren’t, cameras, right? This isn’t a joke? Is metal man here?”

Peter kissed him again. “Just us. No cameras, no Avengers.”

Deadpool took in a long breath. He squeezed Peter’s hips. “Holy shit I must be dreaming.”

“That’s what we *should* be doing.”

Deadpool whined. “Noooo. No dreaming. Sex.”

He angled his hips up toward Peter desperately.

Peter swallowed. “I have work in the morning, Wade.”

Deadpool groaned loudly and bucked his hips. “Spidey, baby boy, you can’t be serious.”

“I...I have work,” Peter said, voice barely above a whisper. He shut his eyes and tried to calm his



breathing. He was stricken by a mixture of panic and arousal. “Can’t you be the responsible one this time?”

Deadpool shook his head and let his hands travel down Peter’s legs. Peter twitched. “Sorry, no can do. I have a lap full of Spider-Man and a working dick. Greater men than I would concede.”

“Wade...”

Deadpool reached behind Peter and curled fingers around his butt. “Oh, sweet Jesus I’ve been waiting for this moment. And FUCK, it’s even better than I imagined. Why am I not balls deep in you yet?”

“I’ve never been with a guy before,” Peter admitted quietly, unable to keep the slight fear out of his voice. There was a brief silence that followed.

Deadpool lifted one hand and stroked Peter’s cheek gently. Peter tilted his head closer and pressed a kiss to the palm. Deadpool gave Peter a soft smile, one that gave his eyes the thinnest crinkles. “We can wait, Spidey.”

Peter smiled back; it was saying something that Deadpool was offering to hold off on sex. It wasn’t that Peter *didn’t* want it, but it was late and his mind was cloudy and his feelings overworking. He slid off Deadpool’s chest and moved back into his previous orientation. Deadpool wrapped his arm around Peter protectively, hugging him close.

“Goodnight, Wade.”

“Goodnight, baby boy.”

He slept well that night.

## Chapter End Notes

It only took >30k words for them to kiss lol

## Chapter 9

The spot next to Peter was empty when he woke up. He wasn't concerned, though, as Deadpool had a tendency to wake even earlier than him. Peter's phone buzzed as a reminder of work. He groaned at the thought, considered quitting, and bitterly forced himself out of bed. When he made his way into the kitchen, he saw Deadpool standing in his usual spot at the messiest counter. It was covered in dried spills, sticky spots, and an unnecessarily large collection of utensils. Instead of being in the midst of cooking, though, Deadpool was just slouching against the counter with his head in one of his gloved hands. He was staring blankly at the wall.

"Morning, Wade," Peter said as he stretched. There was a nasty kink in his neck that seemed intent on staying put. He briefly wondered if Deadpool had a knack for massages. "Waiting for your husband to come home from the war?"

Deadpool stilled before turning around and presenting Peter with the most artificial smile he could possibly muster. "Spidey! Sorry I didn't cook anything yet."

Peter furrowed his eyebrows and tried to offer a reassuring smile. For some reason, Deadpool looked ready to bolt from his own apartment. "Uh, that's not a requirement, you know. Food is good, but I've survived this long on pop tarts and other substances that probably aren't allowed to be scientifically classified as food."

Deadpool was quiet.

"Want some coffee?" Peter headed to a nearby cupboard and rummaged through it for two mugs. Deadpool's muted behavior was odd, but it was early and Peter was still riding the high of last night to really consider it significant. "I'm taking your silence as confirmation that you agree it's unnatural to be awake at this ungodly hour, and making you some anyway. The Folgers is still on the counter, right?"

"Yeah," Deadpool said. "You remember that weird incest commercial they had?"

Peter snorted as he scooped a needlessly high amount of coffee grinds into the machine. He turned and leaned against the counter, facing Deadpool. "Yeah. That was a mess on so many levels."

"Guess they were trying to appeal to the South," Deadpool muttered.

"Ouch," Peter said lightly. "So what's with you? Usually by now, you've talked at least one of my ears off, and I currently still have both. You're slacking, man."

Deadpool shrugged. "Weird dream."

Peter watched the machine whirl and start dribbling out coffee. "Ooh, tell me about it. Was I in it?"

Peter listened to the machine spit out the last drips of coffee before realizing Deadpool hadn't responded to his question. He turned around, perplexed. Deadpool was staring off at a distant wall.

"Wade?"

Deadpool blinked and glanced over at him. "Oh, sorry. Yeah, you were in it."

Peter chewed on his lip. "Okaaay. Sugar? Milk? A more in-depth explanation for you being weirder than usual?"

Deadpool fitted on a smile. “Sorry, baby boy. No sugar, though, you’ve got all the sweet I need. Gimme some of that cow titty juice though.”

Peter wrinkled his nose. “Wow, okay. I’m never drinking milk again.”

He fixed up two cups of coffee and handed off one. Deadpool mumbled a ‘thanks’ and sipped it.

Peter took a slow sip, his eyes trained on the other man. “So. The weather.”

“You always this bad with small talk?”

“You’ve met me, right?” Peter glanced at the clock. “Oh shoot. I have to head out. I wanted to shower before work. I’d do that here but I don’t have a change of clothes. Don’t exactly want to put this suit back on.”

Deadpool nodded faintly.

Peter walked over to him. “Don’t I get a kiss goodbye?”

He was rewarded with a grunt.

Peter rolled his eyes. Admittedly, Peter himself wasn’t very talkative before his coffee, but this was Deadpool, and on top of that he was drinking caffeine—even if it had no effect on him, Peter was sure there was some sort of placebo effect present. In his experience, even the thought of coffee could wake him up. Peter set down his only half-finished coffee and closed the gap between where he and Deadpool stood.

“You always this pretty this up close?”

Peter smiled. He leaned up and kissed Deadpool gently. “See you after work?”

Deadpool was frozen for a moment. Peter started to inch toward the door but Deadpool wrapped his fingers around Peter’s arm. Peter furrowed his eyebrows and swiveled on his feet to look back at the other man.

“Wade?”

“Just wait a minute,” Deadpool said. His voice sounded unusually hoarse. “I can kiss you?”

Peter laughed. “Uh, yeah. If you want.”

“So last night,” Deadpool said. “That—you really kissed me?”

Peter gave him a short nod.

“Oh thank Satan’s hairy ballsack,” Deadpool said. He squeezed Peter’s wrist and pulled him into a messy kiss. Peter could taste the bitter tang of coffee mixed with the slightest bit of creamy milk. He smiled into the kiss, wrapping an arm around Deadpool’s back.

Peter pulled back, his lips tingling. “Was this why you were acting so weird?”

“Spidey, when you’ve had as many hallucinations and concussions as I’ve had—not to mention the drugs—you just don’t trust yourself in the morning.”

“Y’know, you could have just *asked* me.”

“Baby boy, if I asked you if we were together every time I lusted after that ass, you’d never hear anything else outta this mouth.” Deadpool perked up. “Does this mean baby boy can become your official nickname? I’ve already got the hashtag fired up, it’ll be a hit. Wait, no that’s too much nickname commitment too fast. Let me think. Butter muffin? Itsy bitsy? Lovebug? Pudding pop? Stop me when you hear one you like.”

“Stop,” Peter said through a laugh. “Please, stop.”

“So pudding pop?”

Peter felt his cheeks flush a tinge of pink. He hoped his mask covered it, though it seemed unlikely based on how warm he felt. “I’ve always kind of liked baby boy.”

“I knew it!” Deadpool shouted triumphantly. “So the first time I called you that?”

“No,” Peter said quickly. The first time had been the second time they met, and Peter was seconds away from calling the police, as was he every subsequent encounter for the next few months. The relationship between the two had an unmistakably rocky beginning. Somewhere down the line, though, the nickname stopped being antagonizing to hear and began being almost sought after. Peter had never let that slip before, of course, but today seemed as good a day as any. “Definitely not.”

Deadpool looked at him with curiosity. “So when?”

“Well...” Peter chewed on his lip. “I don’t know. I can’t think of an exact point in time. One day it made me want to rip my hair out and the next it made me smile. Look, Wade, I’ll stroke your ego later, but I *really* have to get to work.”

Deadpool sighed. “Fine, leave me all by my lonesome. I’ll have you know I have you beat, though! I fell in love with that ass the moment I saw it.”

Peter snorted. “Thanks. I’ll be back after work?”

He gave Deadpool one last kiss and started off toward his apartment, smiling all the while. It took until he was opening the door to The Daily Bugle for the realization to fully permeate his brain. Holy Batman, he was dating Deadpool. He let out an incredulous laugh and clutched his backpack strap closer to him. Even having already known how Deadpool felt, it still felt like a highly realistic dream. Sure, he knew Deadpool was attracted to his athletic body—many people were; Peter knew in part based off of the hashtag #Spideysass. There was a chance it had initially been targeting his snarking comments, but based on the consistent stream of pictures of his ass, it no longer served that purpose. The idea that the man wanted an actual relationship, though—and one with Peter in particular. It didn’t fit the image Peter held of Deadpool, but he was more than pleased to be wrong for once.

Well, he assumed Deadpool wanted a relationship. He collapsed into his chair and stared at his reflection in the blank computer screen. Jesus, had he just assumed they were boyfriends when all Deadpool truly wanted was a booty call? He groaned internally; leave it to him to not clarify before leaving for work.

Peter Parker did not do casual, meaning through the transitive property, Spider-Man did not do casual either. He threw everything he had plus interest into relationships. Maybe it could be a flaw how invested he was and how much he sacrificed, but he wasn’t willing to put someone in danger without doing everything in his power to lower the possibility. He wasn’t always the most introspective person, but he knew himself well enough to be certain that he would not survive

another Gwen. Deadpool couldn't die, but losing a person he loved didn't always indicate death. Sometimes it almost felt worse when it didn't, but he also couldn't bring himself to be upset at the prospect of evading death.

He and Deadpool had been acquaintances at best. Peter wasn't a cruel person and felt a melancholic regret even when complete strangers died. Perhaps his empathy would be the death of him, but he couldn't think of a situation in which he wouldn't risk his life to save another. What was interesting, though, was that he knew Deadpool would do the same for him. Perhaps it didn't share the same sentiment, as Deadpool could come back, but Peter felt just as honored as if Deadpool couldn't.

Crap; he was in deep. He sighed and fiddled with the mouse. As much as he longed to angst and mull over his insecurities, work meant being able to pay bills and feed himself. At the moment, the latter was more important. He was definitely going to sulk later, though. Maybe over some ice cream if he was feeling particularly reckless. And maybe with Deadpool while simultaneously keeping him in the dark about the true reason for his frustration. Maybe it was kind of a jerk move, but he was selfish enough to want to spend the extra time with Deadpool. He was three-fourths through an article and lost in thought when his phone buzzed obnoxiously.

**heyyyy**

**the extra ys mean i wanna fuck**

**;:-)**

Peter cracked a smile.

**Charming**

It was nice that Deadpool could cheer him up without even knowing there was a problem in the first place.

**i know thnx :\* i think ur pretty neat too xoxoxo**

That shouldn't have made Peter blush. That *really* shouldn't have made Peter blush.

**You text like a 12 year old**

Which, incidentally, was the age Deadpool occasionally acted.

**lol damn not even a day and my bf is already roasting me**

**u owe me sum kisses for that ;p**

Peter felt his heart thump happily. Boyfriend. He sent back a quick 'xxx'.

Wow. Way for him to make assumptions about his assumptions. It was a good feeling, though, knowing he and Deadpool were on the same page. Other than knowing his secret identity, of course. Was it wrong to continue keeping Peter Parker from Deadpool? He knew Deadpool was okay with him keeping his identity a secret, but it still felt too much like lying. From what he could tell, Deadpool wasn't very fond of Peter's civilian self. There was a chance that his feelings would change with additional knowledge, but it was somewhat risky. Not to mention the fact that Deadpool kept a picture of Peter on his nightstand. Peter couldn't conjure any sensible explanation for that, other than the thought that maybe Deadpool already knew.

The notion was a little unsettling. It wasn't impossible, especially considering how poorly Peter had been in his attempts to distance himself from Spider-Man. With all the time he spent around Deadpool, it was difficult to present himself with a differing personality without feeling too artificial. He wanted Deadpool to know the real him, not some persona he clung to in order to throw the man off track. There was lying to keep someone safe, and then there was lying for more malicious reasons. He thought back to Aunt May, who seemed to light up whenever he gave any indication of being close to someone, platonically or romantically. She always thought he needed a partner, someone to always be there by his side through life. She had been crushed when it hadn't been Gwen or MJ—as had Peter, honestly—but she was still holding out hope. Then there was MJ, who would be looking for a name soon. He had never dated anyone who knew him first as Spider-Man, and maybe that was better. Spider-Man was cocky, powerful, and interesting, whereas Peter Parker was nerdy, boring, and insecure. It made more sense to see if someone liked the more normal side of him before exposing the exciting side. Peter knew Deadpool wasn't shallow, but that did nothing to assuage his insecurities.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a gunshot and a scream. He leaped to his feet and surveyed the area. There were some co-workers shouting and scurrying toward the break room. Another shot rang out and penetrated the front glass door. Peter crouched next to his desk, peering out from the side. A few men dressed in black burst through the door, wielding guns. The tallest man took a few steps forward and looked around the entrance room. He shot the main light, sparks flying and littering the floor. He told the others to spread out; he was quiet, but Peter had the advantage of super hearing.

“Remember; it's Peter Parker.”

Peter sucked in a silent breath and slunk back behind his desk. He could hear Deadpool's words ringing in his head: *“You know there are three hits out on you right now?”* His office was one of the ones closer to the front, and his name sat proudly in gold letters right above ‘Ned Leeds’ and right below ‘Betty Brant’. He glanced behind him; Betty had run off earlier to assist Jameson in a favor—probably coffee if his years employed were anything to go off of, and Ned was sitting stiffly in his chair, eyes wide and face pale.

“Leeds,” Peter hissed and motioned violently. *“Get down.”*

Ned blinked but quickly complied. He shot Peter a panicked look. “Oh man, Parker. We don't get paid anywhere near enough to deal with this kind of crap.”

Peter sighed. “Just stay down, okay? Don't make any noises or sudden movements.”

“I didn't realize you were the expert on shoot-ups!” He sounded hysterical, which, in all honesty, would probably have been Peter too were it not for him being Spider-Man and used to dealing with criminals.

“Shhh,” Peter said. He rested his head against the wood of his desk. Even without the suit, he was fast, but that didn't guarantee safety. Not to mention, he was without any webs or other devices. There was the potential to slip out, but he didn't think Ned would be able to sneak out without making a scene, and Peter didn't want to leave him behind. If the target was absent, there was no telling how the criminals would react. Sometimes they got angry and took it out on civilians. As it was, there were at least three men with guns, potentially more on the way. As Peter Parker, he could take out a few, but his odds worsened with each additional person and weapon.

“Move aside.”

Peter peeked out again; one of the masked men was pointing a gun at Isabel Bunsen, who looked

frozen with fear. When seconds passed and she hadn't taken so much as a step toward safety, the man shot her in the side. She cried out and crumpled to the floor. Kathryn Cushing went running to her side and was shot as well.

Peter jumped up; suit or no suit, he had to do *something*.

"You know there are more legal ways to get your name in the paper."

The Avengers. Iron Man fired a blast at the man who had been shooting, knocking him over. The other two men redirected their attention toward him and started opening fire. Captain America blocked a few bullets with his shield and tossed it into the shoulder of the tallest man. Peter hadn't noticed before, but a few more masked criminals had made their way into the building and were looking for potential hostages.

"Hawkeye, keep watch for more people coming," Captain America ordered. He kned a short, squat man in the stomach and knocked him to the ground; the man went flying from the force and crashed into the main front desk. "Iron Man—what are you doing here?"

"Aww, Cap, that's just mean. You know I'm a real team player."

"Not you—Deadpool."

"What, lil' ol me?" Deadpool dropped from the ceiling—somehow. "Obviously I'm here to kick bubblegum and chew ass. You didn't read my blog post about it? Here, gimme your number; I'll text you the URL."

"Deadpool, you're a liability," Captain America said flatly. "Go home."

"You two done?" Black Widow kicked the skull of a man creeping toward the break room. She stepped on his back with her heels, drawing a snap and a screech from him. Peter winced; he didn't usually feel bad for the enemy, but Black Widow was more than terrifying. "We can reprimand Deadpool when there aren't lives on the line."

"Excuse me," Deadpool said. "I'm like, the main character of this thing! Where the plot goes, I goes!"

"More coming," Hawkeye grunted. His arrow sailed sharply through the air as he incapacitated one of the farther away enemies. "Think we can use Deadpool to distract 'em?"

"No, he'd enjoy that too much," Iron Man mused. "Wasp, go check for hostages."

"Got it, boss." Wasp flew into the room that still held Peter and Ned. She quirked an eyebrow. "How you boys holding up?"

"Get me out of here!"

Peter sighed. "Just peachy."

He could spot Deadpool and Iron Man still bickering as they fought off the masked men. Captain America looked mildly annoyed at the disturbance and Black Widow looked prepared to leave a spot open for the team. She seemed to be taking her annoyance out on the enemies if the pile of bodies next to her was anything to go off of. Wasp ushered the two toward the back of the building near the stairs where a large group of coworkers was already huddling.

"You'll be safe here," Wasp said with a wink and flew back to the fight.

And he would be, but he wanted to be out there fighting. Some of his coworkers were praying while others were tearfully calling loved ones. Peter felt an ache of duty hammering in his chest. Not only was it his city that was under attack, but also his workplace and his coworkers, some of whom he had known for years. He started inching back toward the main office when a hand grabbed his arm.

It was Ned, surprisingly enough. “What the hell do you think you’re doing, Parker?”

“I’m just going to go see what’s happening.”

“That’s probably the worst idea you’ve ever had,” Ned hissed. “And I remember that Hugh Highway article you wrote.”

Peter flushed; he had hoped *no one* remembered that article. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

“Just let the superheroes do their job! They can handle it.”

“I can too,” Peter insisted and tugged his arm free. He turned around only to bump straight into Deadpool’s chest. He took a step back and looked up warily. “Uhhh.”

Deadpool eyed him. “Where do you think you’re going, silly?”

“To the bathroom?”

“He’s lying,” Ned supplied. Peter turned to glare at him. “What? You *are*.”

Deadpool crouched, putting his hands on his knees. “Bad things happen to little boys who lie, you know. You ever read Pinocchio? The Boy Who Cried Wolverine?”

“I’m not that short,” Peter said dully and crossed his arms. “You’re talking to my crotch right now.”

“I know,” Deadpool said shortly. He popped back up and rolled on his heels, his hands clasped behind his back. “So, you got a death wish? ‘Cause that’s what’s gonna happen to you if you go back out there.”

“It’s a kink, actually,” Peter said, trying to squeeze past the man.

Deadpool nodded and widened his stance to better block the path. Peter glared at him. “And I can appreciate that. But I can’t let you do that, Starfox.”

“Wow,” Ned said. “He’s just as nerdy as you are.”

“Not helping, Leeds.”

“Hey, toots, remember when we talked in the cereal aisle about this exact situation and you didn’t believe me?” Deadpool crossed his arms. “You believe me now?”

Ned raised an eyebrow and glanced around the office, as though the whole conversation was some elaborate comedy sketch. Peter could only wish for such, but unfortunately, it was just his life, which admittedly was somewhat of a joke. “Parker, you know this guy?”

Peter faltered, his shoulders tightening. “I mean, somewhat. He’s a friend of a friend if we’re being technical about it.”

Ned squinted. “Wait a second... Is this Spider-Man?”



Both Peter and Deadpool groaned.

“Seriously? It’s just red. That’s literally the only color we share,” Deadpool said. “At least in this universe. This is still 616, right?”

“He looks nothing like Spider-Man,” Peter added. “And acts nothing like him.”

“My ass is nowhere near that perky,” Deadpool said solemnly.

Peter grimaced. “And Spider-Man doesn’t talk about his ass.”

“Maybe not to *you*,” Deadpool shot back.

Ned held up his hands in surrender. “Jeez, okay. It was just a question. I’m not usually this close to a superhero.”

“Also incorrect,” Deadpool said. “But I’ll let it slide.”

“Deadpool,” Peter said. “At least tell me what’s going on.”

“Generic and cliché masked men waving their guns around and trying to take you hostage. Guessing they either wanted ransom from Spider-Man or the Avengers or both.”

Peter sighed. “The Avengers don’t even know me. I used to intern with Mr. Stark, but I’ve been taking this year off. I haven’t even been to the tower in months.”

Deadpool shrugged. “They don’t care; Spider-Man knows the Avengers, meaning you’ve got an opening. So you gonna stay here like a good little boy?”

“Deadpool, go home.”

Deadpool turned around. Iron Man and Black Widow were standing a few feet away, watching him with blatant suspicion. “What, already?”

“It’s been taken care of,” Iron Man said, gesturing toward the main room where all the criminals were either incapacitated or groaning from their injuries. “You’re just scaring the workers at this point.”

Deadpool pouted. “But I wanted to be a part of the merry men. There’s gotta be at least one thing left for me to shoot or mutilate.”

“No,” Peter said quickly. “No shooting, and definitely no mutilating. Just... go home Deadpool.”

He wanted to be around Deadpool, but not like this. He wanted Deadpool safe at home, not squabbling with the Avengers, and not close enough to Peter Parker to figure out his identity. He could tell Deadpool was hurt, though, with the look he sent Peter’s way.

Deadpool looked at him with a blank expression. Somehow, even through the mask, Peter could make out his thinly stretched lips and narrowed eyes. Normally Peter wouldn’t have been unfazed, but it was always just the slightest bit unnerving when Deadpool directed the gaze at him. He was used to seeing it sent to villains and frequently Iron Man or Captain America, but rarely Peter. It made his heart sting a little, made him feel as though he was being lumped with *everyone else*, instead of being in the snug box that had ‘Has Deadpool’s approval’ stamped on it. There were few people who could withstand Deadpool’s personality, yet Peter somehow felt cherished to be one of them. Which, of course, made it all that much worse when the balance shifted.

“You heard the kid,” Iron Man said, his voice sounding smug. Peter was somewhat impressed that such a distinctive tone was possible through the armor. He also had a slowly growing urge to shout back at Iron Man, to insist that he didn’t particularly want *him* here, either. This was his city—he could protect it, suit or no suit. And twenty-two definitely *was not* a kid.

Peter watched Deadpool stomp away, mumbling under his breath about an ‘old fogie’.

“You want us to take you to the tower? We can keep a better eye on you there.”

Peter hesitated, giving himself a few seconds to calm down. He had no real reason to be angry at the Avengers; if anything, he was angry with himself. He was angry that he had snuffed Deadpool, that he had to hide his identity, and that he hadn’t been able to protect either Isabel or Kathryn. The Avengers were doing their best to help, though, completely oblivious to Peter’s inner turmoil. In all honesty, he didn’t want them knowing what he was thinking. Spider-Man and the Avengers were already on rocky terms from their initial refusal to let him join. They had teamed up since, but it was often stilted and done with as little contact as possible. Spider-Man rarely sought them out anymore. As it was, he did tend to be more of a solo act, save for Deadpool as of late.

In the grand scheme of things, it would have been incredible to have a real tour of the tower, but the notion seemed like almost a betrayal to Deadpool. The man worked side by side with Peter and was openly loathed by the Avengers. When it came down to a choice between the two options, Peter had a strong feeling that Deadpool would win. “I really appreciate the offer, but I think I’m okay.”

Iron Man shrugged and tossed a small electronic device to Peter. “It’s up to you. But here’s a comm if you’re ever in trouble. Let’s grab the others, Widow.”

Peter stared down at his hands. He felt almost honored to hold an Avengers communicator, even if it being gifted had not been under the best circumstances. In a perfect world, Captain America would have congratulated him for saving the Avengers from some egregiously difficult monster, offered him a paid job, and decided maybe Deadpool wasn’t so bad and similarly had the potential to become an Avenger. His perfect world also greatly lacked in realism.

Ned eyed the device enviously as he passed Peter. “Man, you attract the weirdest people.”

“It’s part of the job,” Peter said as he pocketed the comm.

## Chapter 10

### Chapter Notes

Okay so when I got the idea to write this it was going to be 10k words max. That clearly didn't pan out so well. Sorry if the ending feels a bit rushed. I went back and forth on whether or not to squeeze more plot out of it, but this was the only conclusion I felt satisfied with. And thank you everyone who commented, kudos'd, and bookmarked this fic. It means a lot.

The rest of the day went smoothly, though a good portion of the workers were still uneasy. The police commissioned extra security guards to watch the perimeter. Peter was somewhat surprised they hadn't simply gotten the day off, but he supposed that was business for you. Both Isabel and Kathryn had been taken to the nearby hospital and reported to be in stable conditions with minor internal bleeding. Peter was more than relieved at the arrival of the news; he couldn't bear the thought of others dying just for access to him.

Deadpool didn't text him for the rest of the day, though Peter needed the time anyway to finish up his article and clear his mind. It did little to curb his worries, but it was a nice distraction.

When he announced his presence at Deadpool's apartment, he only received a grunt in return.

Peter frowned and made his way into the kitchen where Deadpool was halfheartedly making a stir fry.

"Smells good," Peter said, suddenly feeling more awkward than he thought possible. It was honestly impressive, considering how awkward he normally was. "You okay, Wade?"

Deadpool sighed. "Yeah, Spidey, sorry."

He turned and gave Peter a kiss. He put actual care and interest into it, which eased Peter's worries. Peter leaned back and rested his forehead against Deadpool's.

"No need to be sorry," Peter said. "You wanna talk about it?"

"It's just... fucking metal man," Deadpool cursed and broke away from Peter. Peter hesitated, unsure of whether or not physical contact was helping or hurting. He stood a few feet away, letting Deadpool decide whether or not he wanted the touch. "He acts so high and mighty like his shit doesn't stink. And then he has the gall to act like *I'm* causing trouble when I was just watching after Peter."

"Peter?"

"His workplace got attacked," Deadpool said with a sigh. "Lotta men wanted to get to him."

"He said you were following him," Peter ventured. Of course, he already knew the answer to it, but he wanted to see if Deadpool was going to try to deny it.

"No," Deadpool said, and it was short and detached. "For once, I was actually keeping someone safe. And I'm pretty sure we've done this song and dance, Spidey."

“It just so happens I’m a fan of encores,” Peter said, because sometimes he wasn’t smart enough to realize when he was pushing too far. “I saw his picture on your bedside—”

Deadpool threw down his spatula. His face was twisted in a storm of fury that Peter had never seen directed at him. Even when he and Deadpool had fought over Peter getting shot, it hadn’t been as bad. It was unnerving. Peter’s eyes widened at the movement, keeping a guarded stance.

“Don’t fucking go near him! I don’t care that you and I are on good terms if you lay on finger on him!”

Peter jumped back a foot, waves of defensiveness overcoming him. “What the hell are you on about? *He’s my friend*. I wouldn’t hurt him—I don’t even hurt bad guys other than maybe their pride.” He scrunched his face up in confusion. “I thought—I thought you didn’t even like him.”

Deadpool slumped back against the counter, looking utterly defeated. It was as though a switch had been flipped. Peter wordlessly followed suit and let his hand rest right next to Deadpool’s.

Deadpool glanced over and gave Peter a weary look. “You’re a stubborn fuck, you know that?”

Peter’s lips quirked. “I’ve been told that, yes.”

“He’s... special, okay? I know you two work together sometimes or whatever, but this guy, Spidey.” Deadpool let out a strained laugh. “He’s the real deal.”

Peter felt his heart thump wildly, felt it fling itself against his ribcage and beg for an escape that he couldn’t grant it. He wasn’t sure if he was excited or almost jealous of his alter ego. After all, Deadpool was dating Spider-Man—not Peter Parker. Well, sort of.

“I’ve been watching him,” Deadpool admitted. “Not—not to hurt him or anything like that. The kid is just a total nerd, but man he gets attention from some baddies.”

“Why were you watching him?”

Deadpool sighed. “It’s been a while. Kid’s nice. Back a few years ago he paid for the two fifty I was out of for dinner. I wasn’t even in costume—just my hoodie. He looked straight at my face and just smiled, said he’d cover it and not to worry.”

Peter swallowed nervously. It had been so long ago he hadn’t thought to connect the face with the man he later met as Deadpool. He had just seen the man’s face fall at the realization of not having enough money and acted on instinct. He had experienced the same thing far too often and knew the shame and embarrassment that trailed alongside. “Oh.”

“He saw the scars,” Deadpool continued. “And he didn’t even blink twice. He wouldn’t let me pay him back the next day, either. I thought someone had hired him to mess with me, metal man or something just for shits and giggles, but I watched him for a few months and nothing else happened. I’m not about to let him actually talk to me, though, none of that interview shit. I don’t want him to get hurt by association—you know how trusting he is. And he gets watched more than the Super Bowl, let me tell you. Green Goblin, Swarm—”

“Swarm,” Peter muttered. It made sense—it made so much sense that he wasn’t sure how he had overlooked it, or how he had never noticed Deadpool’s unwavering presence. It was almost worrying that he hadn’t, but perhaps Deadpool didn’t trigger his Spidey sense. Come to think of it, though, he did see Deadpool oddly frequently while in civilian clothing. “He said you’d do anything...”

Deadpool raised an eyebrow. “What now?”

Peter cleared his throat. “That week you were gone... I dealt with Swarm. He went on the usual villain rant saying I’d regret not staying out of his way, and that you would, too. He, uh, said that he’d be able to get you to do anything to protect Peter.”

“Peter...” Deadpool narrowed his eyes and leapt to his feet. He started pacing in front of Peter, hands balled into tense fists. “And you’re just telling me this *NOW*? Shit, Spidey! The fuck is wrong with you? I’ve got to go check on him! I haven’t seen him since his work was attacked... I knew I shouldn’t have left him there!”

“He’s okay,” Peter interrupted. Did Deadpool know where he *lived*? “Trust me.”

Deadpool grimaced. “Didn’t think to fuckin’ trust *me* with the message that Swarm is back.”

Peter waved him off. “It was weeks ago. He got taken into custody that night; I called the police. I’m not worried about what he’ll do. He’s more annoying than threatening.”

“Maybe *you’re* not worried,” Deadpool said roughly, “but Peter can’t just heal up like we can if he gets hurt. And he’s not going to be able to outrun him. And his work *just* got attacked; I know it was Swarm’s worker bees. The men had stripes of yellow on their wrists. That’s no fashion statement: it’s loyalty branding.”

Peter was about to retort when he felt a scorching heat dangerously close to his back. He turned toward the stove and his face paled. “Wade, the food is on fire.”

“Shit!” Deadpool whipped around and threw the pan to the ground. He pulled out his gun and shot it twice.

“Seriously? *What is that even going to do.*”

“You got any better ideas, Einstein?”

“Uh, maybe a *fire extinguisher*?”

Deadpool gave a sheepish smile. “I... might have used it to try to fly out my window.”

Wow; he was dating this man.

Thankfully, the fire alarm picked up on the ensuing chaos and within a few seconds the sprinklers turned on, extinguishing the fire and drenching the two men. Normally Peter would have been annoyed, but he was more glad that he wasn’t burning to death. Things like that kind of put a damper on his day.

Peter sighed and turned off the stove. “Thank God you didn’t somehow use those up, too.”

Deadpool crouched and poked the burnt pan with the barrel of his gun. He looked up at Peter, eyes bright and hopeful. “I think it might still be salvageable. You like the taste of burnt?”

“Wade,” Peter said wearily, “just order a pizza or something. And a new fire extinguisher.”

Deadpool grimaced and stood up, letting the gun drop at his feet. It thankfully didn’t go off; Peter didn’t want to begin to imagine how that scenario would go. “I was trying to be all romantic and crap. I should have never abandoned tacos. It’s like when you denounce God or some shit and get struck by lightning.”

Peter's expression softened and he rested his hand on Deadpool's shoulder, thumbing at where there was a knot from stress. "It's okay. It...it was really nice of you to make dinner like that. I appreciate it a lot. Let's just, sit on the couch for a few, okay?"

Deadpool let Peter drag him over to the couch and sighed. "Man, baby boy, if it weren't for you, this day would have been the worst. Even if you are being a Nosy Nancy about Peter."

Peter smiled slightly and leaned his head against Deadpool's shoulder. "I'm sorry about the Avengers."

"Nah, I don't want to be a part of their snooty-ass jerk off club anyway," Deadpool sniffed. "I bet they order anchovies on their pizzas."

"I'm sure they do," Peter said.

The two lapsed into silence, just soaking up each other's company after an exhausting day.

Peter lifted his head and turned to face Deadpool. "Hey... Wade?"

"Yeah, Spidey?"

"You're really worried about Peter, aren't you?"

Deadpool was quiet for a moment. "What, my crazy outburst didn't clue you in?"

Peter laughed softly. "A bit, yeah. I know you mean well, I really do. But Peter and I have known each other for... a while, and he's never been targeted before."

"Something must have changed," Deadpool insisted, his face twisting into a frown. Peter wondered if he was running explanations through his head, wondered if any of them had merit. Peter himself wasn't even sure why it had happened. "It doesn't make sense. If he would just let me keep watch..."

"He's stubborn," Peter mused. "Extremely so."

"Tell me about it," Deadpool muttered, dragging a hand down his face.

"So your plan is to just keep an eye on him no matter what?"

"I can't die, baby boy," Deadpool said with a small shrug. "Might as well."

Peter sucked in a breath. That was not the kind of answer he wanted to hear. "I see."

Deadpool's lips curled up with glee. "Are you jealous, Spidey?"

"Hardly; I don't want you to die—not for him, not for me. Just. Don't do anything stupid, okay?"

"That's kind of my shtick, baby boy. That and penis jokes."

"I'm nowhere near as surprised as you seem to think I'd be," Peter said. "I've known you for long enough."

Deadpool looked curious. "How long *have* we known each other, Spidey? Feels like a lifetime, don't it?"

"Three years," Peter answered quickly, a flush soon following. "You showed up when I was

fighting Vulture and mocked his outfit until he knocked you unconscious and I had to save you.”

“My knight in shining spandex,” Deadpool said with a swoon. “You have to admit, though; he does look like Big Bird and Dr. Seuss’ Sneetches had a love child.”

“A little,” Peter said, smiling softly. He leaned in and kissed Deadpool chastely on the cheek. “But you’re supposed to make that kind of quip *after* you’re sure you can take him on.”

“We make a good team though! Team Spideypool!” Deadpool leaned in and gave Peter a kiss that far exceeded decent. It was probably banned in some countries, Peter thought faintly once Deadpool had pulled back with an unabashed grin.

Peter took a moment to collect himself and remember what they had even been talking about. As it turned out, Deadpool could kiss very, very well.

“We do,” Peter said eventually. It was a weird thought, working side by side with Deadpool—especially now that they were together in a more personal way. He had never dated anyone he fought alongside, which was probably for the better, but at the same time, he kind of liked having a partner in more than one sense of the word. It definitely made it easier when date nights were inevitably interrupted by villains. “We really do.”

Deadpool eyed him. “You having some kind of emotional flashback? Should I grab the tissues?”

“No, no,” Peter said.

“Good,” Deadpool said. “‘Cause I don’t have any that aren’t covered in jizz or blood.”

Peter huffed. “Gross, dude. But here I am, not at all surprised by that, either. Someday I’m going to force you to buy a vacuum, or at least some air freshener.”

“It’s my natural musk,” Deadpool said proudly, shoving his armpit to Peter’s nose. Peter gagged and shoved him off the couch. “What? I thought you’d be attracted to my pheromones and shit. Isn’t that biology?”

“Even biology can’t explain the fact that you somehow smell like *that*,” Peter said, nose wrinkled. He took a few breaths of clean—cleaner, at least—air. “Jesus, you trying to kill me over here?”

“With my love!” Deadpool shouted eagerly, clambering back onto the couch. “Is it working? Here, smell my other pit.”

“I will web you to the wall,” Peter threatened, shielding his face from a potential armpit attack.

“Kinky!” Deadpool said. “Can I at least pick the wall? I want the one facing my window so everyone can see. Wait, no. Across from the bathroom mirror. *I* want to see.”

Peter rolled his eyes. “Narcissist.”

“Ain’t nothing wrong with a little self-love, Spidey,” Deadpool said. “It’s extra useful when you get transported into a universe with alternate versions of yourself. Can anyone say ‘threesome’? Foursome if you’re lucky!”

Deadpool stiffened and went quiet. He shifted around on the couch.

Peter frowned. “Uh, are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Deadpool said, breathless. “Just imagined three of you at once. You, uh, sure

multiplying isn't one of your powers?"

"Yes, because spiders can clone themselves," Peter said, though his cheeks did heat up at the thought of more than one Deadpool. The flush quickly left, though, with the realization that there would be twice as much conversation. God, the Deadpools would probably *team up* to be annoying. Peter crossed that fantasy off his mental list.

"Spidey, you got bitten by a radioactive spider. Don't act like cloning is impossible."

Peter shrugged. "Well, I can't multiply. I can tell you that much."

Deadpool sighed. "It's okay. More than one of you would probably short circuit me anyhow. An ass that fine has to be a one and only else the world could explode."

"Yeah, that's how that works."

"It is and nothing you say can make me think otherwise."

"Look, Wade. I—I trust you."

Deadpool grinned. "I trust you too, baby boy."

"And so I should have told you sooner." Peter chewed on his lip. There was no going back from revealing his identity, and there was the risk that Deadpool would be so mad at his secrecy that he would spread it around. But he did trust the man. And he was tired of lying. Deadpool had looked utterly distraught from Peter's connection to Swarm. Peter himself wasn't worried, but he didn't like the idea of standing by while Deadpool was in the dark. It wasn't fair to either of them, especially with the addition of a relationship. The day had been long, and all he really wanted was to relax with his boyfriend, sans mask and secrets.

"Oh fuck, are you really only twelve?"

Peter punched Deadpool's arm. "Seriously! No, just listen, please. I'm sorry for not telling you, but I also know you understand, even if you don't bother hiding it yourself. Just, please don't be too mad."

He took a deep breath and placed his trembling hands on the edge of his mask. It rested delicately just above the tip of his nose. He could feel his heart thrash with the knowledge of what he was about to do. His body was sweating and shaking, doing its darnedest to convince him otherwise.

"Baby boy," Deadpool said cautiously. "We both know I'm damn curious, but this isn't necessary."

"I know," Peter said simply. He shut his eyes and pulled the rest of the mask off, tossing it in a random direction.

There was silence. Peter peeked one eye open, his heart stilled from nerves.

Deadpool let out a sob and lifted a shaky hand to cradle Peter's bare cheek. "P-Petey?"

Peter swallowed and gave a jerky nod. "Yeah. It's me."

Deadpool tackled him onto his back and released a shout of joy. "Petey! And—And Spidey! It's like all my wet dreams coming true! I *knew* I had seen that ass somewhere."

Peter laughed as Deadpool peppered kisses all across his face. "Of course. Not the height, speech mannerisms, or ability to fight you off in the grocery store, but my *ass*."



“It’s a very remarkable ass,” Deadpool said seriously. “The kind of ass a man don’t just forget about. Just wait until you’ve heard the poems I’ve written about it—oh and the ballad! The stanzas don’t fit exactly, but it’s the thought that counts, right? Oh man, though. I felt kinda weird crushing on your friend, but now I can have my cake and eat it too! Talk about using up all my good luck at once; I’m going to be rolling 1s for the next decade. You better be ready to get all nat 20s to balance it out.”

Peter wrapped his arms around Deadpool’s neck and tugged him closer. So Deadpool *had* had a crush on Peter. He felt oddly vindicated by the fact. “I’ll do my best. So… then you’re not upset about who I am?”

“Nah, baby boy,” Deadpool said. “This is best case scenario territory. Hell, I’d be upset if you *weren’t* you.”

Peter let go of a breath and all the weight from hiding his identity. “Okay. Good. I’d be upset if I weren’t me, too. I just… at work today, and the whole thing with Swarm. I know how worried you got about it, but I really wasn’t lying when I said I’d be okay.”

Deadpool buried his face into Peter’s shoulder. “Yeah, ‘cause you got crazy spider powers that you never bothered to mention.”

“Only two other people know,” Peter said softly. “It used to be three, but. She’s gone now.”

“Ooof,” Deadpool said. “That’s some heavy shit.”

Peter nodded. “Yeah. I like to keep it private. Peter Parker is… kind of a nerd, so people don’t expect me to be Spider-Man. I like to use it to my advantage.”

“You’re still my smol bean who needs to be protected, though.”

“I’m not even going to ask,” Peter said.

“You’re learning,” Deadpool said.

Peter laughed as Deadpool pulled back. “I am, aren’t I. But look, if Swarm comes back for me, I’ll deal with him, okay? He can’t take me when I’m Peter Parker, and he definitely can’t take me as Spider-Man.”

“Spidey, you got shot at twice. Plus your work just got attacked. Isn’t that already coming after you?”

Peter shrugged. “The Avengers and you took care of his men. I highly doubt he has more connections willing to jump in. And I’ll be more cautious now that I know there’s a hit. I’m not about to live my life in constant fear, though. That’s exactly what he wants. Honestly, it’s not the first time and it likely won’t be the last. Lotta people in this city don’t like Spider-Man.”

“Well, they’re wrong,” Deadpool said. “You really think you can handle Swarm, baby boy?”

Peter smiled gently. “I did the first time, didn’t I? I know you’re not used to seeing me like this, but I really can handle my own. I’ll be okay.”

“Can I at least still stalk you in case you run into trouble?”

“You can go on patrol with me if that’s what you’re asking. No more standing outside my workplace, though. The company’s already having to pay for therapy after the shoot-up.” Peter

sighed. “You uh, you can come in as Wade, though. I don’t mind that. I’d like that, actually.”

Deadpool narrowed his eyes and scrutinized Peter. “Wait, no *wonder*! No one other than Spider-Man would be so nice to a freak like me. Damn, you think you’re lucky enough to get two people to like you, but he’s just the same fuckin’ guy.”

Peter frowned. “You’re not a freak, Wade. And it was me, yeah, but I didn’t know who you were at that point. We hadn’t formally met.”

“You don’t have to make me feel better,” Deadpool said with an attempted chuckle.

Peter squeezed Deadpool. “Too bad. You’re stuck with me which means you’re stuck with at the very least daily compliments, sometimes hourly ones. I’ll make you a graph if need be.”

“WOW. Nerd alert,” Deadpool scoffed. “You’re making me want to beat you up for your lunch money, four eyes.”

“You can try, but there isn’t any,” Peter said. “Also I don’t even need the glasses! The whole Spider-Man thing fixed my vision. I just wear them for consistency when I’m out of the suit.”

“Once a four eyes, always a four eyes,” Deadpool said. “It is pretty fucking hot, though. It’s like someone was making a porno and decided the twink had to be a nerd so they just put glasses on him and called it a day.”

“Thanks,” Peter said. “I love being compared to porn stars.”

“If the shoe fits,” Deadpool giggled. “*If the penis fits.*”

“Okay, enough!” Peter said, a laugh bubbling in his throat and threatening to escape. “I need you to know something else.”

Deadpool faltered. “Twelve?”

“Oh my GOD, I’m twenty-two,” Peter said with a groan. “One of these days I’m going to print out my birth certificate and plaster it over every inch of your walls and make you regret all of this.”

Deadpool snorted. “As if I could ever regret anything that keeps you in my life.”

Peter felt a flutter of love bounce around his chest like a ping pong ball. He swallowed and tried to erase the blush forming on his face. “Just that there are two very important women in my life who are going to want to meet you, and they’re both terrifying.”

Deadpool shrugged—or at least tried to while on top of Peter; he ended up just shuffling closer. Of course, Peter wasn’t about to complain. He stroked Deadpool’s back slowly, feeling the curves and dips of his muscles. He felt a mixture of tender affection and anxious excitement.

“I’m a hit with the ladies. I’ve even seduced Death,” Deadpool gave a wink at that.

Peter poked Deadpool’s nose with his index finger. He did his best to convey a serious tone through the touch. “For the record, you are not allowed to hit *on* them.”

“Boring,” Deadpool whined and bit Peter’s finger playfully. Peter felt the blush return with the intensity of a hurricane. Deadpool paused for a moment. “I should have seen this coming... I never saw Spider-Man and Peter in the same place. Wait a minute... I’ve never seen Spider-Man and Cher in the same place!”

“Shocking, I know,” Peter said grimly. He shuffled out from under Deadpool and leaned back against the couch. His legs were beginning to fall asleep, despite his still present desire to be close. Deadpool remedied his conflict by scooting close and pressing their thighs together. “I was actually born Peter ‘Cher’ Parker. Can you accept me despite this flaw?”

“Uh, excuse me, baby boy. Cher is a goddess. Plus I know your middle name is Benjamin.”

Peter stiffened. “Uh, and you know that why?”

“Petey, Petey-pie, Petester.”

“No, no, and no.”

“Aww, not even Petey? It’s cute, like what you’d call your dog.”

Peter’s lips curled up. “Not a dog, first off. And okay, *maybe* that one because it’s actually close to my real name. But at this rate, you’re never going to call me by my actual name. I’ve got to come up with some nicknames for you to even out the playing field. How do you feel about DP?”

“It makes me think of double penetration,” Deadpool admitted. “I like it!”

Peter snorted. “Okay, never mind.”

“But yeah, I’ve read your whole page on the Marvel wiki. You get around, baby boy. Black Cat *and* Ms. Marvel? And I’m not even going to open the can of worms that’s Black Widow. All I’m saying about that is *damn son*. But also I kinda stalked you.”

Peter sighed. “That you did. Which was a little weird when you were avoiding me but following ‘Peter’.”

“Heh.” Deadpool winced.

“I get it,” Peter said with a shrug. Secret identities always made everything twice as complicated. “A bit. Getting into a relationship is... intimidating. At least that’s why I assumed you were avoiding me.”

“It was,” Deadpool said. “You freaked me out with how close you got.”

Peter laughed. “Okay, because you don’t get in my personal space all the time?”

“It’s different, Petey!” Deadpool insisted. And okay, yeah, he definitely liked being called that. There was something about the intimacy of a nickname derived from his real name. He was going to find excuses to be called that. “I’ve been chasing that ass for years, and you always rejected me.”

“I guess I didn’t really think about it,” Peter admitted. “Not seriously. You were a mercenary and you flirted with anything that had a pulse—and some things that didn’t. The words were pretty empty to me. That’s not a bad thing, but I never considered having anything with you because of it.”

“So my plan of watching ProTech with you until you fell in love with me worked?”

Peter laughed and fondly wrapped his arm around Deadpool’s shoulder. The touch was novel but also felt as though Peter had known it his whole life. He wasn’t sure what it meant, but he liked it. The soft press of arms and the warmth from within. The blinding smiles and unwavering loyalty—

he could get used to it, and he planned to. “I guess it did—you’re a man of your word, Wade.”

“Always,” Deadpool said, grinning widely. “Pinky promise!”

Peter linked his smallest finger with the other man’s and gave a fervent squeeze. He locked eyes with Deadpool, giving him the brightest smile he could muster. “Pinky promise.”

And for once, he felt balanced.

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